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Primitive Men in India

MONORANJAN BANERJEE

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PRIMITIVE MEN IN INDIA

by

Monoranjan Banerjee, M.A.

With foreword of

Prof. Humayun Kabir

Minister, Govt. of India.

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FOREWORD

INDIA has often been described as the anthropologist's paradise. We have here societies which remind us of conditions that existed in prehistoric times. At the other end of the scale, there are social traditions and concepts that are sophisticated even by present-day standards. In short, almost every type of human society is represented in the Indian kaleidoscope.

Recent studies in anthropology have proved one thing beyond doubt. The simplest types of human society have certain well-established mores and social ideals. Also, they exhibit values which more complicated societies have largely lost. In the exchange among communities at different stages of development, the traffic is never one-sided.

It is a matter of regret that inspite of such variety of social life in India, the average Indian is largely ignorant of societies other than those of his immediate environment. Every attempt to give a sympathetic and true account of different types of Indian society is therefore welcome. Such studies are valuable on both theoretical and practical considerations. They increase knowledge of the evolution of human society and simultaneously foster a greater sense of unity among different sections of the Indian people.

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Shri Monoranjan Banerjee has undertaken a study of the tribal people who live in different parts of India. I hope his work will arouse the interest of the average citizen and make him feel a greater respect and kinship for fellow citizens who follow different ways of life.

New Delhi
30th April, '63

Humayun Kabir

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PREFACE

IN this book, I have made an attempt to present the lives of the primitive men in India. The treatment has been of a brief kind. Primitive men and primitive society are always a subject for interesting study to understand the development and workings of human society. In our country, there are many such primitive groups of men and very few of us know much about them. When India is forging ahead, it is the duty of the Indians to pull up their brethren who are lagging behind on the road to civilization and progress. With that object in view, I present this book before the reading public. I am not sure, how far I could do justice to the subject.

I acknowledge my gratitude and indebtedness to all writers, who have written books on this subject, from whose books I have consulted extensively. The publishers of this book very kindly supplied me with matters that helped me a lot to write this book.

I shall be failing in my duty, if I do not specially mention the name of Shri K. M. Vaid from whom I got the photographs.

Lastly, I express my gratefulness to Prof. Humayun Kabir, Minister, Government of India, for the trouble he took in writing a Foreword to my book.

May 15, 1964 Monoranjan Banerjee

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CONTENTS

The People of the Nagaland 9

The People of the Khashi Hills 17

The People of the Lushai Hills 23

The People of the Manipur State 30

The Khang People 40

The People of Arakan 49

The People of Kuladan 58

The Inhabitants of the Andamans 65

The People of Minicoy Island 69

The Santhals 74

The Oraon People 80

The People of Pangi Area 85

The Bhot People 91

The Jars 97

The Khasa People 103

The People of the Kulu Valley 109

The People of Kinnaur Area 116

The Baiga People 122

The Kabaili People 128

The Tharu People 133

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NAGA DANCE

—By Courtesy
K. M. VAID

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THE PEOPLE OF THE NAGALAND

THE Nagaland is situated in the North-East frontier of India. It is a world famous mountainous tract of land and a wonder of the world. The inhabitants of this area are very backward. Certainly they are human beings but they are not civilized. Naturally the question crops in mind, why they could not progress, even being born in a noble land like India. There may be only one answer to this question that it has been so owing to the illiteracy prevalent among the people. Today, they are lagging far behind us. It is sure, if they had not been deprived of education, they could have advanced considerably in the run of life.

This beautiful land of the Nagas enjoys all the qualities requisite for rendering it one of the finest in India. The origin of the word Naga is unknown. It has been supposed by some that the word has been derived from the Sanskrit '*Nagna*', meaning the paucity of clothing. Peculiar habits and manners, religious superstitions and the distinctive shape of their weapons separated them from other hilly tribes. Like other tribal people in every part of the globe, the love for dancing is a favourite passion for them. Their war dance is most striking. In this performance women dance in the inner circle, while men holding weapons in their hands dance around them, beating tune and singing in strains of wild and plaintive melody.

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It is more than clear that they had a glorious past but with the passage of time it has been a lost document. To-day, they appear to us strangers. Their mode of life, social customs, food and dresses have a peculiar flavour and a distinctive trait of their own. They are quite incapable of appreciating the progress of the world outside their knowledge and they prefer more to remain bogged in the mire of superstitions and particular ways of life.

This land lies between the hilly tracts of Assam border and Burma. The dense forests and continuous heavy pouring of rains have made the area a most disagreeable one. As a result, the lives of the inhabitants are strenuous and full of hardships. In spite of that, it is known that the Naga people have been living here since the pre-historic days.

There are many tribes among them. The *Maos*, *Maring*, *Angami*, *Kuwai* and *Thagkhuls* are the principal ones who live in this area. These tribes are quite separate from one another by virtue of their customs and social habits. Each tribe worships their own Gods with great devotion and reverence. At places, they even slaughter human beings as offering to a deity. As a matter of fact, they all worship Aryan Gods and Godesses but it cannot be said definitely whether they belong to the stock of the Aryans of ancient India or are the descendants of some aborogines.

The social life of these Naga people are full of peculiarities. Every tribe has a separate costume of a particular colour, by which different tribes could be

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distinguished very easily. Like all other aboriginals, they also keep their body almost naked. They are not in the habit of wrapping up their bodies with garments. Most of the women-folk wear a small piece of cloth around their girdle. They are very fond of adorning themselves with necklaces of coral, oyester, cowrie and pearls etc. It is very interesting to note that both men and women wear ear rings of big sizes in their ears. Those rings are made either of tusks of elephants or of good timber. The women-folk are so strongly built that they usually wear ornaments of heavy weight without feeling any inconvenience.

To make them awake against the vices of superstitions and prejudices, some religious organisations have been working in their midst. Among them, the names of Christian Missionaries and of the Vedantic Asram are worth-recording. As a result of these activities, many transformations are taking place in their ways of life. Many Nagas are seen dressed in Western fashion and in Indian Khadi garments now-a-days. The women-folk have also started using sarees and jackets and many of them are seen in such fashionable costumes, that at times, it becomes difficult to recognise them as Nagas. In spite of all these changes in fashions and dresses there has been little progress in other fields, where they are absolutely in the dark.

In general, though strongly built, their stature is short and their complexion is of wheat colour. Their faces are always smiling and gay. When they take a resolution to perform something, they exhibit much firmness of purpose, and they cannot rest without performing it.

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It is an established fact that they earn bread by hard physical labour. They have a strong dislike of earning by bad means. They never go out to beg from others. To go abegging is considered to be a sin in their society. They meet their necessities of life through hard labour and to them labour is honourable and a thing of pride.

The women-folk of the Nagas are of stout built and their capacity for labour is proverbial. Side by side, alongwith their household work, they labour in the fields. They gather firewoods from the forests, husk paddy, bring water from the distant ponds and weave and knit clothes. Usually the men-folk spend their time hunting wild animals in the forests and sometimes working in the fields at will.

About food they are very unorthodox. Their principal food is meat. They prefer meat more than vegetables. Excluding the meat of cats, they take meat of almost all the animals. Their favourite dish is rice and fish curry.

The custom of marriage among the Nagas is also very peculiar. The man, whose hand has the sanctity of murdering some persons is considered to be the fit groom for a bride. Parents do not bother about the marriages of their children as is the custom in our society. The boy and the girl select their partners according to their choice. After that, it is their duty to seek for the permission of their parents. If the parents accept the proposal, the boy taking some good stock of cattle alongwith him comes to the house of the girl and offers those as presents to the girl's parents. Then the marriage is held. For a specified time of not more than one year, the boy has to stay at the girl's house and perform physical labour. If, during

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that period, the boy is observed to be lazy or indolent by the girl and her relatives, the marriage proposal is broken off, or if he is found to be a worthy one, the marriage is confirmed.

In the Naga society there is no custom of giving dowry to the boy by the parents of the girl. On the contrary, it is the boy who has to give dowry to the girl. As a matter of fact, there is no fixed rule for it and it depends absolutely on one's capacity. The period of physical labour which the boy undergoes in the girl's house, is considered to be the dowry from the boy. That is the price the boy pays to the parents of the girl for bringing up the girl whom he will take away. Different tribes follow different customs, but there is no system of paying dowry in cash among them.

Among the Nagas, a brother can marry his own sister and there is no social restriction about that. They perform no religious ceremony during the marriage function. The persons who are worthless and shirk labour are considered to be outlaws of society and looked down upon by others. They are prevented from getting married. The Nagas do not even allow them to live in their society. Physical labour is considered by them as an object of worship. In this matter, perhaps there cannot be any comparison between them and other peoples.

No people perhaps in the world are more alive to the preservation of matrimonial honour than the Nagas and any offer of insult to the wife and daughter of another would meet with deadly satisfaction from either the axe or spear. The unmarried men are not allowed under any

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circumstances to sleep at night in the family residence.

They are extremely hospitable according to their own method. Both sexes delight in ornamenting their naked body with *rattan*, amber and glass beads. The most peculiar is the dress of a warrior, who adorns himself with the addition of human hair, strings of teeth extracted from the jaws of the fallen enemy and with tusks of boars as ear-rings, all making a hedious war-like aspect.

A remarkable feature is their deficiency of hair on their cheeks and chins. Of all the crimes they consider theft as the greatest and severe punishment follows after detection. Fastening the culprit by rope, they drag him on the summit of a hill and roll him down the side, till the body is torn to pieces.

Hunting is a favourite amusement and elephant flesh is a delicacy for them. Their domestic dogs catch deer for them. Those dogs go out at day-break into the woods, kill deer and return home howling continually. The Nagas, atonce understand the howls and follow the dogs and bring the wounded animal with delight for a merry feast.

Everyday after sunrise, a shrill voice awakens all to their occupation. People in batches guard the residential areas all through the day and night against enemy penetration. All young men are considered to be the servants of the chief. They have to learn to fight and at advanced age they are eligible for marriage.

The burial ceremony of the Naga chief is quite an interesting episode in the life of the whole community.

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Usually the corpse remain six months in the house and after that the ceremony is performed. In the morning two big buffaloes, several hogs and a great number of fowls are killed on the occasion. About noon, numbers of Nagas from the neighbouring villages dressed in fanciful fashion arrive there, beating their drums and carrying shield, spears and axes. At the setting of the sun, a large company of young women come round the corpse and covering it with leaves and flowers, carries it to a small hill and burn it amid the festivities of the people.

In the domain of character and morality, the Nagas are of high attainments. Honesty and truthfulness are their natural qualities. They are not in the habit of depriving others from their dues. It can be seen from their game hunting practices. As a rule they do not go for hunting beyond the boundaries of their respective villages and if perchance, they infringe that rule and enter into other's domain, in that circumstances, they share the booty with them to whom it is due.

Mostly, the Nagas live on agriculture. In their territory they produce rice, potato and cotton in great quantity. All of them cultivate their own lands, which are quite sufficient for their own bread. With the growth of population, when land becomes scarce in a family, they clear off further forests and make it for cultivation. They have a peculiar ancient practice of keeping a tall tree in the midst of their fields which stands as a sentinel.

Their agriculture is not very extensively carried on because of the dirth of land. However every portions of land are carefully terraced near rivulets from where they

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can have water for their lands. Rice is the only produce among cereals. A considerable quantity of cotton is grown on the slopes of the hills.

Their manner of cooking is also very interesting. It is performed in joints of bamboos, in which rice, chillies and flesh are thrust in tightly with water by the aid of a stick and then placed on a fire place.

The Nagas believe in spirit and magic spells and they worship ghosts and spirits. When they return back as victorious in battle, they pour much quantity of wines in the name of spirits and ghosts with the accompaniment of songs and dances.

The observance of mourning for the dead is very peculiar among them. There is a sect who places two living bears inside the coffin of the dead man. They believe that by this act the dead man will not find any difficulty to reach heaven.

They had great skill in the art of warfare in ancient times but they have lost much of their glory in the present world. It can be said without any contradiction that although they are backward in many respects, yet they are surely on the road to progress and their advancement is not negligible at all. Recently the people of the Nagaland have formed a separate state within the framework of the Union of India. Thus, the Nagas are in the process of stepping forward, awaking from the age long slumber which kept them backward and uncivilized for many centuries. The people of India are watching their progress with pride and honour, hoping that the Nagas will play their role shoulder to shoulder to make India happy and prosperous.

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THE PEOPLE OF THE KHASHI HILLS

IN this world there are different kinds of people of different colours and races. Some of them are white, some are dark, some are brown and some are yellow. Our India is also a land where varieties of nationalities are found. The Khashi race is a mountainous people. Their homeland being between Shillong and the middle part of the Cherapunji Hills. Without any exaggeration, this land can be called a land of the snakes, because of the fact, that the inhabitants of this place worship snakes with religious devotion. In this territory snakes are found in a great number. If some one, coming from outside, begins to live here, he will surely leave the place being afraid of snakes. In fact, this Khashi territory is the abode of the snakes.

To combat the prevailing supremacy of snakes, these people performed many cruel practices based on superstitious notions. The land being snake infested, they even offered blood, sacrificing human beings, for the pacification of these demons. It is said that when a venomous serpent makes den in a house and it cannot be driven away by any means, then they propitiate the serpant God by giving human blood. Before the sacrificial function is arranged, they have a great task of selecting the right man. If the selection becomes wrong, the snake

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God becomes very furious and as a result, none can live in that house. Moreover. if once a man is selected, his blood must be given. The system of sacrifice is also very peculiar. The man, who is to perform the sacrificial function, first of all purifies himself by cleaning his body after taking a bath. After that, he wears a clean dress. Then he goes out for hunting the prey, taking along with him, one pair of scissors, a knife and a needle. The needle is made of silver. He also takes in one of his hands a little quantity of rice mixed with turmaric. The man whose blood will be taken must be free from any disease or disabilities. Chanting *mantras*, he throws the rice on the body of the selected man. The victim being affected by its charms becomes powerless and completely surrenders. At that time the hunting man binds the victim with a rope and overpowering him by force cuts off some flock of hair from his head. Then, perforating the frontal portion of his nose by the needle, he collects some quantity of blood. After that he returns to his home where a very pleasant atmosphere is created by the propitiation of snake God according to custom.

There is no denying of the fact that their ways of life are savage. Looking at thier residential houses one will be more convinced that they are in the most uncivilized state of affairs. Every house is like that of an armoury, where bows and arrows, shields and swords will be visible in great numbers. This very aspect of their life proves that they are the descendants of some warrior race. In fact, they are great warriors, having wonderful marksmanship and possessing remarkable skill in the art of battle.

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After the month of January, these Khashi people go on target-practising in which every able-bodied man participate. It is taken as a great sport by them. The inhabitants of one village challenge to those of another village. If that is accepted, selection of participants takes place and a day is fixed for thes ame. On the fixed day, taking bows and arrows, members of both the sides arrive and they choose an umpire. All the players stand in rows facing the opponents. Under the direction of the respective guides, the throwing of bows and arrows continues and the umpire gives the final verdict of victory for the winning side. To witness the game thousands of people of the neighbouring areas collect there irrespective of sexes. The womenfolk serve the players with cold drinks and refreshments while the games are on.

These people call themselves Hindus. They do not wholly believe in idol worship. They do not even believe in the existence of Hell. They believe that after death man goes to the garden of heaven, where they do not suffer from any want or difficulties.

The custom of burial is also very peculiar among them. First of all, they wash the dead body with hot water and then cover it with a shroud. Then it is decorated with some ornaments and the head is wrapped by untwisted threads. After this, it is taken inside a quiet room and laid down over a mattress. If the dead person is a masculine one, a cock is sacrificed ; in the case of a woman, a bull is offered to a deity. The lower jaw of the bull or the left leg of the cock is kept by the side of the corpse as the case may be, and the meat of the sacri-

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ficed animal is kept hanging from the roof over the dead body. All types of food are kept there and for three days the dead body remains there in that position. After all these formalitites, it is carried to the cremation ground for its burial, according to their social custom. On this occasion many boars are killed to pave the way for the deliverence of the soul of the dead man. They believe that a dead man is on the pilgrimage to the garden of heaven and he will reach there after finishing the journey. They also have the practice of placing some cash money with the dead body. They think that the dead man may purchase some articles of food with that money if he requires, while on his way to the garden of heaven. Otherwise, feeling hungry, he may come back without completing the journey, following a wrong route.

It is known from historical sources that once these people had a kingdom of their own in the hilly tracts of Assam. It is not known how they lost it but there are plenty of proofs that these people had a glorious past behind them.

At present, they mostly earn their livelihood by physical labour. Education is an unknown thing in the land. There are many interesting folk stories about the land which cannot be taken as wholly untrue. They have a great faith in ghosts and spirits. By their hard labour, they eat their bread and they have practically no time for leisure. What a disheartening life they lead in this advanced age ! There is one great virtue in them that they are dauntless and go on doing their duties through all hazards and many hardships of life. A good section of their

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people live on gathering wood penetrating at least eight to ten miles inside forests and selling these in the markets.

When a son is born in the family, they make merriments by drinks and dances at the time of giving a name to the newly-born child. Like our custom, they do not have the naming ceremony by an astrologer or a priest. Their practices are very peculiar but quite interesting at the same time.

On the next day after the birth of the child, the naming ceremony is performed. The court-yard of the house is cleaned by smearing process and either the father of the child or an old man of the house sits there to perform the ceremony. Many articles, such as rice, flour, four or five pieces of dry fish are kept in a clean pot. If the child is a male one, a bow and arrow is also given ; if it is a girl, a rope is supplied to drag on loads. On this occasion, all the prominent persons of the village are invited. When everything is done, the man sitting in the court-yard stands up taking the wine-pot in his hand. Uttering the name of God he pours wine drop by drop on the earth. The assembled persons, with the falling of each drop of wine, go on uttering different names one after another, but the name coinciding with the last drop of wine is the name given to the newly born babe.

All their ceremonies, concerning birth or death are performed in peculiar manner and those are quite different from ours. What a great difference exists in our social practices in spite of the fact that we all belong to the same conntry ! We are all brethren, still how different we

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are ! Their food, ways af life, their customs and behaviour are all absolutely different from ours. They burn their dead bodies, no doubt, but they collect the bones and and bury them in a holy place where they build a tomb engraving the name of the dead man. Some tombs are so majestic that one cannot easily believe that they are built by them.

At present, great efforts are being made by the government to educate them and to make their lives more easy and comfortable. They live in the dark abyss of ignorance, where no rays of light have yet penetrated. There is a hope that in course of time they will become the free citizens of India like others contributing their mite to bring glory to their country, religion and society.

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THE PEOPLE OF THE LUSHAI HILLS

IN the mountainous region of Northern Assam there is a state called Lushai, whose approaches are terribly dangerous owing to the dense forests that surround it. The rains fall here incessantly throughout the whole year and it becomes very difficult for a foreigner to travel from one part of the country to another. The local inhabitants of this place are quite accustomed to it and they are not unhappy at all, because they possess the stamina of overcoming all the barriers created by Nature.

The people who live in this Lushai state are called '*Kukis*' and they are considered as part and parcel of the ancient people of India. However, it cannot be said very definitely who were their fore-fathers and what religion they followed, because scholars have differences of opinion about it. In fact, these people are also in the dark about their past nationality and religion.

They are considered to be less civilized than the Nagas. It is difficult to guess, why there could not be any trace of the influences of ancient and modern Indian civilizations upon them. Even to-day, they live in an uncivilized world and in complete darkness of the progress made by other peoples.

Of all the tribal peoples of India, the *Kukis* are considered to be the most backward. At present, the

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Nagas are advancing in great strides but the *Kukis* are not on the road to progress. The Indian Govt. has taken many steps that these people may give up their life of ignorance and darkness and live like civilized people of the country. It appears that the day is fast approaching when no nationalities in India will remain backward and uncivilized. To-day, to write about the lives of these *Kuki* people, we feel a regular pang within our hearts, but the thoughts of the future which awaits them, bring a different feeling of great expectations. However backward these people may be, they are a part of our own flesh and blood. Due to ignorance they may consider themselves as a different people, but when education will give them knowledge and power of judgement, on that day, they will surely understand that they are the brethern of the Indian people, from whom they had been drifting away so long. A spur of new consciousness will bring a great awakening among them and on that day, they will come out of their narrow environments into the bosom of Mother India. On that day a brother will recognise another brother and will work together to lead their country to prosperity. What a glorious future we will build up for India on that day!

The communal life and social customs of these *Kuki* people are very peculiar. Many strange superstitions are in vogue among them and very scrupulously they observe the old traditions which have come down to them from their ancient fore-fathers. The most interesting thing is the funeral ceremony of a dead man. When a a man dies, the dead body, wrapped in a beautiful white scarf, is kept in a room with open passages. Then, infor-

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mation is sent to all the relatives and friends, inviting them all to be present there. When the near and dear ones gather together, the dead body is decorated with flowers and perfumes. Then, the favourite weapon of the dead man is placed to his right hand and on the left side sits his wife, who goes on lamenting for her dead husband. After that, a feast is arranged for, where every invited guest participates. A little quantity of food is also kept near the dead body and a chieftain of the community standing up, prays to the dead body to take it and after that the assembled persons partake of the food. These customs are observed with a belief, that after death, a man goes on a pilgrimage and if he feels hungry on his way, he will not be able to complete his journey and a great danger will befall on him.

They are all addicted to smoking of tobacco. Every one irrespective of age is habituated to it. So, there is a custom of offering tobacco even to a dead man. It takes at least two days to perform all these funeral formalities of the deceased and after that the dead body is placed into the grave.

The *Kukis* are of several sects and they all observe different social practices. One of the sects observes a novel practice of keeping the dead body packed up in a wooden box to dry up in the sun. This measure they take simply for the reason that all his relatives may come and have a last look at him. Owing to lack of communication, it takes a long time for the relations to assemble at the house of the dead man and the corpse has to be preserved till their arrival. In

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fact, the last rites of the dead man are performed after a considerable time of his death. He is put into the grave only when all his friends and relations had the opportunity of coming and seeing him for the last time.

Another sect observes a peculiar practice in funeral affair, which is really quite astonishing. These people keep the dead body hanging in the corridor from the roof of the building and the wife of the dead man goes on lamenting for the dead man sitting under the corpse, at least for a week. During these seven days she cannot leave that place and if she does, it is considered to be a great sin. Along with her laments, she has another work to perform. She goes on spinning for the whole period and as a result, it tells upon her physique greatly. There is one good thing that she has no restriction with regard to taking of food during that period. After the expiry of seven days, the dead body is brought down and his head is cut off from the body to be preserved in the house and the body is put into the grave.

Oh ! what a peculiar custom they observe ! In fact, one thing is certain that the restrictive regulations of the society prove, beyond doubt, that once their past was full of glories. They had a world of their own. Alas ! where are gone those days and that past glory !

The womenfolk of the *Kukis* do all the necessary household work. They prepare food, collect firewood from forest, sow and reap in the fields and bring up children. The menfolk work only when necessity arises to clear the forests for cultivation, otherwise, all other works are practically done by the womenfolk. It does not mean

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that the menfolk remain sitting idle at home. They are always out to fight against their enemies. They are very expert in the art of warfare.

A spectacular ceremony is observed when the menfolk go to battles. Showers of blessings and flowers from the old men and women, are thrown on them and they are given a heroic send off. If they become victorious in the battle, they carry along with them the severed heads of the defeated enemies on their way back. Dressed in multi-coloured garments and high turbans, singing and dancing in a wild joy of victory, they create an atmosphere of great horror and terror in the whole vicinity. All the residents of the villages go out to welcome them with garlands and pots of wine in their hands. The wives of the married soldiers, first of all, wash their husband's hands with wine. They believe that by this act their husbands become free from all sins that they might have committed in the battlefields; otherwise, none of the wives will take their husbands back to their houses. This practice has been introduced in their society since a long time and persons refusing to perform it, are considered as degraded souls. After this preliminary washing ceremony, men and women go on drinking wine to their heart's content. On reaching their village, the victorious menfolk, first of all, visit the house of their chieftain. There they present those severed heads of the defeated enemies to their chief and go on dancing and singing along with other merriments.

The Lushai people hate those menfolk who are lazy, who become slaves of their wives and who are forced to work in the land. They are never considered to be manly

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and no woman wants to marry such a person. They are more or less ostracised by the society. They are not allowed to sit in the assembly of the village and their opinions are not valued at all.

In this state, all work is done by women, and inspite of that no amount of serfdom is seen there. Women have freedom to do any work they like. Girls enjoy the right of choosing their own partners for marriage. No amount of pressure or any objection comes from the parents' side.

As these people are lovers of warfare, there are many aspects of their lives, which correspond with the lives of the modern soldiers. They consider it a sacred duty to follow the orders of their chieftain whether right or wrong. It is not their business to judge it. They are simply to abide by his orders and if required, they will not hesitate to shed their blood to obey it, rather than disobey him. They also observe the practice of giving orders by signals, in addition to the oral orders. For example, when a massenger moves in the village taking the studded necklace of the chieftain in his hand, all the male members of the village will understand that the chieftain has ordered them to assemble at once at his place. Immediately, they assemble there. Like this, there are many other signs prevalent among them in the nature of orders.

Among the *Kukis*, the chieftain is the most respected person of all in the village. All his family members are also equally respected.

Those people have a great practice of going on foot. Their strides are so quick, perhaps no other nations of the

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world can defeat them in the competition of walking. The time we require to cover one mile, they cover at least five miles within that period. Perhaps in the present world they are the most hardy people of all races.

With all their glorious past and civilised traditions, they are, at present, leading a life in great isolation. Fortune has deprived them so long to be at par with the civilized world but it is expected that within the next few years, they will move forward along with their Indian brethren to create a new India where they will have a special place.

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THE PEOPLE OF THE MANIPUR STATE

APPROXIMATELY within an area of eight thousand square miles, the Manipur state is situated on the North-East corner of India, along the hills of Burma. This is a magnificient spot of beauty and it will not be an exaggeration to call it a paradise of North-East India. Nature has bestowed the wonders of beauty on this state in plenty. So, its beauty is proverbial. On a visit to this state one never gets tired to look at its charm because of its variety. The travellers always opine that it is difficult to find any other place like this on earth.

The dense forests, the murmuring springs, beautiful lakes and hills, glittering fountains, tea gardens and fruit trees are the characteristic features of this land. This is not all. It is said that every inch of this land is surrounded with an air of mystery.

The state of Manipur has nearly one thousand square miles of plain lands and the rest is mountainous. In the fields, paddy is grown in great quantity and the hilly regions are also not poor in wealth. A huge quantity of building material, such as teak wood come from this area. Besides this, tea gardens and rubber plantations abound on the slopes of the hills. In fact, there are few places which are so rich in wealth like Manipur.

An old story runs that before it was attacked by the Burmese, this state was so prosperous that no other

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small state could be compared with it. The king's mint was full of coins, gold, pearls and diamonds but the invasion of the Burmese perpetrated much harm and the treasury of the king became empty. Everything was looted by the foreign invaders and the palace of Manipur was completely ransacked. However, the Burmese had not the power to take away the natural wealth. To-day, they are poor but their past history stands as a witness that once they were a wealthy people. Even the relics of the king's palace speak out of its glorious days in the past. It has been well said that if there is a land of Gods on the earth, it is Manipur. Nature is very gracious to give her in plenty. Its store-houses are full of pearls, diamonds and paddy. Oh ! Manipur ! all glory to you. India is proud of you to-day and in future also she will be looking at you with tender eyes !

The early inhabitants of this state are called '*Methe*'. In fact, they resemble the Chinese in features but their appearances are not so round shaped and dull like them. Moreover, they are tall and stout like the descendants of the Aryans of other parts of India. Although to some extent, their faces bear affinity with that of the Chinese, yet there are many whose feature are as simple as ours. As a matter of fact, they are descendants of the Aryans but being the inhabitants of border area, they came in contact with the peoples of the neighbouring lands and established relationship with them through marriages etc. So, some of their offspring resemble the foreigners.

The '*Methe*' people earn their livelihood principally by agriculture. Many of them carry wood from the forest and do work of load-carriers. In many places, they

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catch fish from water and sell them in the market, because fish is in great demand in this part of the country. These people are very much fond of rice and fish curry and they consider it as a special delicacy.

The womenfolk of Manipur wear generally clothes of printed silk, velvets, and multi-coloured sarees and scarfs. They have a great liking for ornament of gold and diamonds which are found in abundance there. They also enjoy social freedom which is still very rare in many parts of India. Their social laws were made by their ancient scholars with the object of bringing peace and happiness to society. Their effort was to make the people live in a simple way without craving for any luxury and fashion.

It is written in their old tenets that one who does not like a thing, he will not try to possess that. The man or woman who is not a comfort seeker, will never have any love for paying attention to physical beauty. The ancient scholars prepared laws for the advancement of happiness of the people. The paths set by them have made the Manipuri people perceptibly higher socially and morally than other tribal peoples. From this, it is clear that the ancient scholars gave much stress upon the purity of one's conduct. In truth, they considered it to be the only way following which a man could be really happy. The scholars of the '*Methe*' sect considered good conduct as a great treasure of human life. So, inspite of being wealthy, these people lived an unostentatious life and enjoyed perfect happiness.

In this state, the use of fashionable articles are prohibited for men and women both. This rule is an old

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practice and now it is not enforced by laws. Yet, the people of this land are following this rule as a matter of religion. The king and queen and their near relations are not to abide by this law. If they want they can use any article of their choice and can consume costly food also. If any one of the '*Methe*' community eats or wears against the current practices of their society, they are considered to be of low breed and enemies of the society.

Agriculture is their principal means of livelihood and womenfolk also work in the fields along with their menfolk, but the amount of labour they have to undergo in the fields are very less in comparison with other parts of India. As usual, in the beginning, they sow seeds in the fields and till the produce ripens and becomes ready for harvest, their duty is to protect them against encroachments by beasts and birds and against other natural calamities. After harvestings, they keep a part of the produce for their own livelihood and sells out the rest in the market. This is the principal work of these people throughout the year.

They enjoy plenty of rest when hervesting is over. During that period they mainly go for hunting games and working in the woods. In these games, they get wild animals in large numbers and this area is considered to be one of the best site for hunting. Tigers, leopards, bears and wild goats etc., are found in plenty.

The womenfolk do not waste their time idling away but they keep themselves always busy with activities like stitching, cutting and weaving of garments and in other household works.

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There is a peculiar custom among them of cutting the lock of hair on both sides of the ears of the maidens. The married women do never cut it off at all. The womenfolk do not bind their hair in a rope like fashion but keep it coiled and hanging over the shoulders and at times, like the Bengali ladies, they keep it pouched together at the back. In their fair round bodies, the fluttering tuft of hair create a wonderful beauty, seeing which one cannot remain without appreciating them.

The menfolk also keep long hair but only few of them have beard and moustaches. At the present time many of them have adopted the fashion of cutting hair in modern style. It is very surprising that they keep the heads of children clean shaved.

The position of the womenfolk in the '*Methe*' society is higher than the menfolk. They do not observe any *purdah* system and like the Indian womenfolk they are not at all nervous to talk with strangers. They are very advanced and do much of the social work. In the village market, almost all the shops are run by them. Like Nature, these womenfolk are also an asset of this country. Their beauty and skill run in parallel, although it is true that they are called '*Jungle Queens*', yet it cannot be denied that their simplicity is an object of admiration for all the civilized world. As a matter of fact, women are more advanced than men in this land.

To-day, we call these people aboriginals and neglect them, considering their backwardness but if we look back to their glorious past, it will be clear to us that once they possessed one of the greatest and finest of

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civilizations of the world.

From the social view point, we find the '*Methe*' people divided into three classes. Their incomes and expenses, food and clothes and other social customs depend on these divisions. The aristrocat class is composed of the king and his associates and rich people of the land. To differentiate them as a class they use a symbol of red scarf. The middle class is composed of those people who are neither very rich, nor very poor. They are a class of people who consider it a sin to lead a life of comfort. They can be recognised by their green-coloured scarf. The other class is that of poor people. They can never live in comfort and luxury. If any one of them attempts to live like that, he is considered a traitor because by doing that, he may bring deterioration and chaos in the economy of the state. They keep an ordinary cotton cloth as their symbol. This social division had been made by their forefathers with a view to keep the economic life of the society in order. So, till now these people follow it blindly or are compelled to follow it.

Naturally, the question arises in mind who were their forefathers, whom they follow so reverentially and worship their ideals even to-day. Whoever they might be, they made Manipur, a paradise on earth and had built a high civilization in old days, remnants of which are found even to-day !'

We should feel proud, knowing that those people were none else than our ancient Aryan forefathers. They were those Aryans whose civilization had been considered as one of the best and in fact, these '*Methe*' people are the

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descendants of them. For some unknown reason, these people lost the kinship with us and mixed with other aboriginals and drifted away from us.

In the great book the *Mahabharat*, there are plenty of proofs of the existence of this state. It has been mentioned therein as the abode of the Aryan people and has been considered as a paradise on earth. In the opinion of historians this place was called *Manindrapur* in the early times. From the legends of ancient books it is learnt that the great leader Arjun of the *Mahabharat* episode married Draupadi, fulfilling many conditions set by her father king Draupad. As a rule of the Pandavas, it was recognised that the other four brothers of Arjun had equal right on Draupadi but she could not live with all the brothers at a time. Under this circumstances, it was settled by the permission of the great saint Narada that when Draupadi would be closeted with one of them, none would go to that place. The brother, who would break this rule, would have to live in banishment for twelve years.

It so happened that one day when Judhisthir was with Draupadi and Arjun was strolling outside, a Brahmin came and reported to Arjun that some bad charactered people had robbed his village. He prayed to Arjun to come to his rescue quickly. On hearing this, Arjun rushed forward to bring his bow and arrows but at once it occurred to his mind that the weapons were kept in that room where Judhisthir and Draupadi had been closeted together. As a result of this, he became very upset. If he did not go out to save this Brahmin from the danger, he would be committing a great sin. On the

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other hand, if he went to bring his weapons, he would break the family rules. At last, in the face of duty, he paid no heed to the rules and at once brought out the weapons from that room and saved the village from the hand of the robbers. As a result, all the brothers forsook Arjun for breaking the agreement of the family.

Thus Arjun, separated from his brothers, went into banishment for twelve years. Gladly he accepted all the hardships and sufferings, without the least repentence. In this way a long period elapsed. During those days Arjun went from one forest to another. One day, when in a forest, he went to take bath in a river, a Nag princess named Ulupi was playing in the water. When the princess saw this handsome man, she fell in love and resolved to get him somehow. She at once caught hold of his legs and dragged him to her abode. When Arjun also looked at Ulupi, he found her exquisitively beautiful and immediately fell in love with her. The love of a hero like Arjun made Ulupi almost mad with joy and being pleased she gave Arjun a boon that henceforth no water devil would be able to endanger his life. After spending some years Arjun reached Manindrapur and there he married princess Chitrangada, the daughter of king Chitrabahan. Before the marriage the king took a promise from Arjun that the son born in the womb of Chitrangada by Arjun should succeed Chitrabahan after his death because he had no son of his own. So the son born of Arjun and Chitrangada became the first Aryan king of Manindrapur. The whole episode left an interesting story behind it.

Thus the first Aryan king of Manindrapur was named

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Bavrubahan. After him reigned Saprubahu, Pakhababa and others. It is said that Pakhababa after conquering the Naga state, got the crown of the Nag. From that time the name of the state became Manipur. May be that the Naga state of that day is the present Nagaland because that state is also situated near Manipur.

The nearest Railway station of Manipur is Silchar, which is one of the Railway terminuses of Indian Railways. To advance further inside one has to travel by motors. The area is mostly mountainous and there is no high roads. As a result there are many places where there is no transport and one has to go on foot. Imphal, the biggest city of Manipur, is its capital and is built on a hill. Although the city is called Imphal, yet the local '*Methe*' residents call it in their provincial language *Sena Kaithal.*

The people of this land even to-day cook their food in earthen wares. They are very keen on preserving the food values of their diet but urban influences are also penetrating there and as a result some of them have started to use metal pots for cooking.

There is one thing which is very popular among the '*Methe*' people and in which they are experts. That is the art of dancing, in which they excel any other parts of India. This artistic dance is famous in the world. This art is considered of great importance for the unmarried girls. It is one of their household works and is a part and parcel of their family life. There is a prohibition that they cannot use it as a profession and earn money through it. Its exhibition in market places is also prohibited by society. It is more than a fact that this Indian art is very

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safe in their hands and we are, no doubt, proud of it.

They are all followers of Hinduism and have much faith in gods and goddesses. The greatest festival of these people is the *Lai Horoa*, which they observe with great pomp and show and every one participates in it with reverence and humility. On this day there is no restriction of any kind on any section of the people. Everyone enjoys equal social freedom on this day. Even the poor can wear jewellery of gold and silver, valuable clothes and other articles of luxury according to their choice. There is no bar for the womenfolk to participate in the dance festival and the wives of the rich people wear a special type of hat on their head which adds to their beauty. In different cities all types of games and exhibitions relating to the occasion are organised on behalf of the state. A popular boat race is held and valuable prizes are distributed to the winners among the participants. On this day, a wave of joy and enthusiasm runs through the hearts of the people of Manipur and they get an outlet to their pent up feelings. The sight of the feminine beauties is so remarkable that even the passions of the Gods are awakened.

This is the history of the people of Manipur, who live in a paradise on earth. Their forefathers were our forefathers, but to-day how different they are from us ! The watch-word of the present day world is progress, so, the day is not far off when they will again merge with us and take us as their own. Then, they will live with us and die with us.

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THE KHANG PEOPLE

NONE can say the exact number of different races. and people living in this world. The course of history played a great havoc in the lives of the people of the earth. Many were uprooted from one place and swept away to another where they had to start anew the struggle for existence. Inspite of all these hazards and cataclismic situations, men never accepted defeat and always faced great dangers with confidence and faught against every peril that came in front of them. At times, they lost everything, but they did not allow their existence to be eliminated. Time wanted to efface them from the pages of history, but it could not be successful. Against all odds, man protected themselves and passed through many phases, taking different roads and developing different civilizations. It has been well said as an analogy that when an earthen pot slipping out of hand breaks into many pieces, likewise, the human race became disunited and formed into many units. The question may be asked—how it came to be so ? Undoubtedly it was the influence of the circumstances which made the early races scattered by the blast of storms like the leaves of trees. The vagaries of Nature crushed the easy course of human lives and as a result it were torn to pieces and mankind had no power to oppose it and stop it.

Now, we will be writing about one of these races, who have lost their way in their march through history. We

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shall call their country as Khang territory now, because they are a new people who were separated from their ancestors. These people live near the Kuladan river of the Arakan Hills in Assam. It is a region of dense forests and it is impossible for any other people to live because of the ferocious animals who are found in abundance there. But the Khang people live there, inspite of the difficulties and dangers that confront them. They have become accustomed to the geographical conditions of the area and they are not at all afraid of the animals who are a constant danger to their lives. They live in the forest with full freedom and without any hindrance to their movements from one part of the land to another. They always move about fully armed and are so skilled in hunting that the wild animals remain always alarmed.

The Khang people never live in houses. Even today, they live in caves like the ancient peoples of the world. Usually the caves are very dark, but they are not at all afraid of anything to dwell inside them. Hiding inside the caves, they save themselves from the hands of the wild and ferocious animals.

They have a peculiar conception of God, who is personified by two names and double appearances. As a result, one of the God is called *Khozing*, who lives in the cliff of the Arakan Hills. These people consider this deity as a little God, who is always protecting them. When there appears any danger or any disease breaks out in the region, the inhabitants worship Him to save them from the peril. Even then, if the calamity is not over, they think that God *Khozing* is somehow displeased with

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them. The result of it is that suffering and death sweeps over the land. They consider them as sinners, so the little God being displeased does not listen to their prayers and they offer many animal sacrifices to please Him and to save them from the orgy of death. They believe that God will be really pleased if sacrifice of animals are offered with reverence, because it is God who created them and they are their beloved children. It is their belief that if they do any wrong, God will pardon them.

They have another faith that a lion keeps watch on the door of the God *Khozing* and it is considered to be His faithful domestic animal. They say that lions do not attack them because he is the servant of the great father and consider them as the children of his master. They believe that lions would have swallowed them if the case would have been different and they would have been altogether destroyed.

Their second God is called by the name *Paiti*. It is their general belief that in a far away land in the West, this God lives in a place where nothing is wanting. Here, God lives alone and the place is considered as heaven.

The ordinary people cannot reach there. This God is great and He has created this universe, millions of stars in the sky, water and other animals on this earth. He is so powerful that He can destroy this world at a wink. The sun is considered to be the Prime Minister of this God, who keeps a watch on every thing of this world. None can hide anything from his view. The daily chart of the activities of all living creatures is kept by him and every evening he places it before God *Paiti*. By this,

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God can know every day what is happening in this world. After the death of a man, his fate is judged going through the history of his activities and he is treated accordingly. Thus, labouring through the whole day, when the sun gets tired, he takes rest in the Western garden of God. He being fatigued, gets asleep and the night creeps in. God *Paiti* and all His servants do their duties regularly without any respite, according to their schedule. This is the system in the kingdom of God.

Like other aboriginals, they also are in the habit of using less garments. Mostly they use hides of animals to cover their secret parts of the body and the rest of the upper part remains absolutely bare. Whatever it may be, there is one thing about them that they are very hardy people. Their economy is such, that if they do not labour hard, they cannot feed their stomach. For that, they are not unhappy at all. They produce food in the fields with so much labour that is unheard of, but they love their soil very much. They never think of leaving that hard life and settle down in some better and prosperous place. They believe that it is by the will of God they have been sent there and if they leave that place without His permission, He will be angry with them and they will be deprived of getting any living space anywhere. For this consideration they cannot leave their land. They were born there and they are to die there. In their opinion, it is a great sin to leave one's own land and they do not intend to go to any other place whatever suffering they may have to bear in future.

Owing to illiteracy, much defections have penetrated into their lives. There are good things also which cast

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evershining glows out of them. One of them is that they keep their word at all cost. They will sacrifice their lives to honour a promise or a duty.

They have so much faith in their God that if anyone gets ill, they do not send for doctors or vaidyas. The patient is left in the name of God. They do nothing but pray to God *Khozing* and it is seen that their prayer is granted. They have complete faith in it. Besides this, they have great belief in spirits and ghosts and in their magical powers. Small-pox is considered to be the most dangerous disease of all and they believe that it appears due to the Satanic influences of some evil spirits. They also believe that these spirits live somewhere in the hideouts of Arakan Hills and when they see that God *Khozing* is taking rest, they come out and spread the terrible disease. In that situation, they follow some Tantric practices to destroy the evil influences. Even then, if the disease does not show any sign of lessening, they carry the patients into the adjacent forest as a matter of segregation and keep them there under the care of one or two nursing hands.

There is a very interesting story current among them about the origin of this world. Millions of years back, the first man named *Talandrakopa* lived there in a cave. However, it is necessary to tell that according to the European Scholars, the earth suffered from the fourth cold wave and ice had spread upto the Equator, at the beginning of the last Stone Age. It could not overlap all the regions of the Equator, because the atmosphere and climate of the area changed considerably prior to that and as a result, its effects were far less than before, All the animals took shelter in cave to protect them from the

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severe cold. Some scholars have said that a little before this age, man was found on earth, but there are some who do not accept this view. They advocate that man came to this earth during the period of the last Stone Age. So the Stone Age is taken to be the age when man was born. Before that, the period was of the creations of many living species. But all these are conjectures and the truth is very difficult to ascertain. The Indian Scholars have never agreed to this version.

Yes, the Khang people believe that they were created by the first proginator, who came out of the cave only for once. At the beginning, this first proginator lived alone and one cannot say how long he lived like that. It is sure that he could not stand to it for a long time. He was a powerful and strong man and he never got afraid of any other beasts or birds, who were found at that time, in great numbers on the surface of the earth. It is said that by virtue of his power and capabilities, he managed to marry the daughter of God. After this marriage, God ordered all the living creatures of the earth to build a road from his palace to the cave, where His son-in-law and daughter would live. All the animals obeyed this order very sincerely, except some of them. This act annoyed God very much and as a result, He gave them a curse that the disobedient would not be able to see anything after sun set. From that day many disgruntled animals, such as, monkeys, earth-worms etc., have been suffering from the curse of God.

This cave of the proginator of the Khang people, Talandrakopa exists even to-day, but it is situated in the

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dense forest of Laushai Hills, which is far away from the Khang territory. This place of the ancient cave has turned to be such a dangerous spot at the present time, that people are afraid to visit that site. It is said that the cave is one mile long, and many strange stories are associated with it. The story of the cave is a true one, because it is found even to-day in the Lushai Hills. It is further said that if one puts his ears near the cave, one could hear voices of man and woman inside it. This voice, the Khang people believe, is the voice of Talandrakopa and his spouse, the daughter of God. They also believe that both of them are immortal and they live inside the cave from time immemorial.

Another peculiar story is that the thunders of the rainy days are from a cannon which Talandrakopa presented to God on the occasion of his marriage. There is a folk story current there about the animals of the forest. They say that in the beginning, people were not accustomed to take meat of animals, but when food became scarce, they were forced to live on meat. At that time all the living creatures—animals, birds and plants spoke he same language like the human beings. The practices were that when human beings felt hungry, they either plucked fruits or killed animals. So, one day, they all approached the daughter of God and told her about their sorrows. Immediately she went to her father, the Almighty, and prayed that all the living animals and other creatures except the human beings should be deprived of their speech. God agreed to the request of his daughter and took away the power of speech of those species. Since that day, the human beings have been able to

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feed their stomach in full with vegetables and meat both according to their requirements.

There are many such stories, but none can say how far those are true. There is no doubt that these are all folk tales like those of other lands.

The Khang people say that in the beginning they lived in another place, on the earth. Perhaps this story may be true according to them. When Talandra-kopa had his cave in the Lushai Hills and how his descendants came down to the plain, no traces of these are found in the Lushai Hills. These are the questions that baffle them at times. In fact, they visit the Lushai Hills and the cave, from which they believe to have sprung, as a holy place. The story of their leaving that place is also an interesting episode. They say that after a few years of the marriage of their first proginator, a great fire broke out in the forest accidentally. The whole area was burnt to ashes, but they could not trace out the origin of the fire. When the fire reached near the cave of their proginator he ordered his children to move to a safe place. So, they all came in the valley near the ocean, coming down from the top of the hills. None can say what happened to their mother, the daughter of God.

Whatever might be the origin of their folk stories we have no doubt, to accept that once these people had a great civilization, a developed culture and an advanced religion and literature, which are buried into the graves of the past. It is true that there are many references about them in the ancient books of India. In fact, in those books, they are shown as our own brethren, who

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had been lost from our family as a result of the cataclismic effect of nature and of the vagaries of the course of human history. To-day, they are lagging behind and called uncivilized but the same land has been nursling all of us, since the dawn of history. It is now our duty to pull them up and lead them to the path of progress.

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THE PEOPLE OF ARAKAN

THE Arakan territory is a mountainous region surrounded by dense forests, lying between the North-East boundary of India and Burma. This is the territory by which at present East Pakistan is connected with Burma through the land route. So much rains fall here during the monsoon, that roads are breached at many places every year. Then, it becomes impossible to go from one place to another within the territory owing to the hazarduous roads through the dense forests.

Among the people who live in this territory two clans *Chakma* and *Khong* are counted to be important. At one time, they all were followers of the regilion of the Aryans, but now they are mostly adherents of Buddhism. This territory being nearer to Burma, the social life of these people has been much influenced by the Burmese customs and practices. In spite of that they did not altogether forget their own ancient culture. Though all the races of this place follow Buddhist religion, yet they do not neglect or disregard the Hindu religion.

Before mentioning their social customs and other practices, it is necessary to write about their history—the glorious past they have behind them, from whom they are descended and how they remained backward when all the world has progressed so much on the road to civilization.

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It has been said that these *Chakma* people were the early inhabitants of Champanagar, an old historical place in India. In fact, from the records of Hiuen-Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, who travelled in India, it is known that the present Bhagalpur area constituted the kingdom of Champanagar of the old days. It is not known why the king of Arakan attacked Champanagar. At that time Champanagar was the kingdom of an Aryan clan named Shakyamong. When the Arakan army attacked them, the soldiers of Shakyamong faced the invading army with great valour but in spite of their heroism they were defeated. The Arakan army occupied the land and enslaved the people. The victorious king issued an order that the defeated Shakyamong people should be brought to the Arakan territory with their stock and barrel and would live there.

In the beginning they had to suffer great hardships to live among the uncivilized Arakanese but in course of time, they got mixed up with them and their lives became easy. As time went on, both the people became more united, through various social contacts. Gradually, each of the sect gave up their separate indentity and formed themselves into one people. Thus, coming in contact with the aboriginals, the Shakyamong people lost their Aryan culture. The result was that they suffered a downfall while the uncivilized Arakanese were much benefitted by of this new element in their social life. In course of time, it became difficult to distinguish them, who were uncivilized and who were Aryans. By their inter-marriages, they also lost the original forms of their appearances. Their social customs

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also became intermixed. So, the descendants of the Aryans, who had a glorious past, were forced to merge themselves in their new environment. Fate decreed them to be in the ranks of the uncivilized once more.

In fact, the word *Chakma* is the degenerated form of Shakyamong.

The *Khong* tribe has also a history of their own. According to the views of Scholars they are the descendants of aborigines. They possess their own language and their alphabets are also of peculiar type, which are termed as Arakanese alphabets. Their separate alphabets show that at one time, these people should have been considerably educated and may be owing to peculiar circumstances, they were driven away from the civilized world.

The marriage customs of the *Chakma* are so interesting that one can not do without mentioning them. Like the descendants of the Aryans of the Northern India, the father of the marriagable girl does not go out in search of a groom for his daughter. On the contrary, it is the father of the son who roams here and there to procure a suitable bride for his son, when the son becomes adult. When he finds out a suitable girl, he approaches the father of the girl with the proposal saying, 'I have come to you with a prayer and I hope, you will not refuse it.' Then, he discloses the proposal. After that, the father of the girl invites all the villagers to an assembly where all the important persons of the village come to attend. The marriage proposal, is discussed there and if the father of the girl agrees to it, they decide upon the payment of an amount by the father of the boy against exigencies arising in future

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as a result of the bad conduct of his son. The boy's father agrees to pay the fixed amount if the girl is murdered by the boy or she commits suicide being oppressed by her husband. This act of payment releases him from the social boycott. Otherwise, he will be called a cheat, a murderer, a social rebel and will be ostracised. At times, this amount becomes a very heavy one. In fact, it is decided by the respective financial position of the parties. It remains always in the eyes of the village heads that under no circumstances the amount exceeds the capacity to pay. After this final decision is done, the groom's party places the proposal of bringing the marriage procession.

On an auspicious day the boy comes to the house of the girl in a procession. Like the Hindu marriage system, they do not burn any sacrificial fire. Their custom is very simple. The boy and the girl are placed on two hanging seats and all friends and relations seat around them. In front of them is kept a plate full of rice, eggs, sweetmeats and other necessary articles according to their custom. After that, the mantles of the groom and bride are tied together and all the persons present there go on coiling threads around them. The meaning of this is that, henceforth, they cannot be separated and once they are bound by one thread, they are bound to be together in life and death. Nothing can seperate them. When these acts are over, the bride and the groom bow before all who are present and receive their blessings. Then, food is given to both of them and they feed each other and the marriage is complete.

Although the marriage is over, yet the marriage party hangs on, because the last ceremony of the marriage is to

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be performed on the next day. On the next day, all the friends and relations are given a party. When the party is over, the newly married couple taking each other's hand nod before all the guests. After that, the father of the girl bids them farewell giving some advice to the son-in-law on family matters.

The *Khong* people have a separate custom of marriage. Here also the father of the son selects the suitable girl himself. Then he goes to the father of the girl with the proposal of becoming the father-in-law of his daughter. If the father of the girl accepts the proposal, he calls all the villagers and orders his own men to bring a cock. When the cock is brought, it is killed and its tongue is taken out. Then, the priests examine the tongue to determine the good and evil effects of the marriage. If the signs are found favourable signifying good omens, the boy reaches the house of the girl on some auspicious day taking a party with him for the marriage. On the other hand, if the signs are found to be bad, the proposal is immediately thrown off. The party of the groom is also composed in a peculiar manner. Only the special friends have the right to accompany the marriage party. On the day of the marriage, they go to the house of the girl singing, dancing and beating drums in a very clumsy manner. Following them, proceed the Buddhist religious heads of the community, who are called *Fungis*, in Arakanese language. Then, they perform all the marriage rites according to their social customs.

Having made the boy stand at a consecrated place, they bring the girl and place her by his side. At that time,

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the sight is worth seeing. The colourful make up of the bride and the bridegroom, and the various types of beautifully coloured garments present a unique spectacle on this occasion. The *Fungi* priest, taking handful of rice in both hands holds them in such a way as to form a cross (×). From that position of the hands, the bride and the groom are to eat rice seven times. Only after the performance of this religious custom the groom earns the social right to have the bride as his own. This is the peculiar marriage custom of the *Khong* tribe.

Like the womenfolk of other parts of India, the Arakanese women dance and sing on the occasion of marriages. We cannot follow the wordings of their songs as we are ignorant of the language. It has been said that their songs are of high poetic gifts and the hidden inherent meanings are of great aesthetic values. From these, one can judge their ancient ideals of life and the high standard of thought they once possessed.

There is a great difference between the *Chakma* and *Khong* people regarding their wearing of garments. The *Chakmas* wear garments more or less like the other Indians but the *Khong* people have a completely different style. Looking from a distance, one cannot easily distinguish between a male and a female of the *Khong* people, because the dresses of both are of the same stuff and style. The *Khong* ladies do not wear sarees like the *Chakma* women but wrap a piece of cloth round their waist. Moreover, the males also keep long hair. To cut off hair is against their social manners. The conception is prevalent among them that in old days, there ruled a powerful king in

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Arakan who had an exquisitively beautiful queen. The king was so mad after her love that the State affairs were all in the hands of the queen and the king remained absorbed in love making. The queen was very capable and she ran the administration most efficiently, and as a result, the land became prosperous and the subjects lived in peace and happiness. The whole people of the land considered the queen as an incarnation of some Goddess. The queen felt that womenfolk were kept in subjugation by the men and they did not consider them as equal to them. So, one day, she made an appeal to her subjects to make an end of this differentiation. She asked womenfolk to discard their sarees and wear a piece of cloth round their waist and the menfolk to keep long hair and to have their hands and feet tattooed.

The people of the State could not disobey the orders of their queen, whom they considered as a Goddess and so accepted her order as God's command. Since that time, the menfolk keep long hair and put tattoos on their hands and feet. The womenfolk also started to wear a piece of cloth round their waist in place of their old saree. They do not bind their hair in plaits but both men and women have a knot-like-style at the back.

The people of Arakan celebrate the Vishnu festival with much pomp and grandeur. This is their greatest festival. During the Spring season, they worship Gautam Budha, Lakshmi, Durga and other Gods and Godesses with much reverence and devotion. On those occasions men and women go on singing and dancing in merriment to please their Gods and Godesses.

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Their is another peculiar custom prevalent among them. When a cheiftain of a village dies, his dead body is decorated profusely and placing it in a chariot, is taken towards the cremation ground in a procession. On reaching there, the chariot is fastened with two thick ropes from both sides. One side of it is considered to be heaven and the opposite one as hell. Then, the assembled persons are equally divided into two sections to pull the chariot. If the heaven side wins, it is considered that the dead man will go to heaven by virtue of his good actions. On the contrary, if the hell side wins, he is to go to hell. After performing all these formalities, the dead body is cremated.

In Arakan, houses are not built in clusters like that of India but they are built at a great distance from one another. In fact, every one builds his house in the middle of his field for keeping a watch over it.

The people of this area love flowers very much and they are very fond of putting flowers on their heads and dresses. The youth among them go to the flower gardens every morning to pluck flowers which they put on the hair of their wives. In family life, flowers play a great role among husband and wife, excelling all other things. Wherever they may be, in the field or in the house at leisure, they will be found adorned with flowers in their garments and hair. In their society no propitious activities could be performed without flowers.

Like the village Assembly Hall of other places, they have a '*Khong House*', constructed near the village, at a beautiful site and situation of quiet atmosphere. This

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house, built of bamboos, is of a small size. That is their temple where the villagers gather to offer prayers and enchant *mantras*. The image of Lord Buddha is worshipped inside it.

Every '*Khong House*' has a priest. His duty is to look after the temple and perform the daily worship as a routine. Besides these, the priest performs marriage ceremonies of the Arakanese. He has also to look after the education of the children of the village. In a garment of saffron-coloured cloth, this priest looks like a high-priest of the ancient time. He does not go to beg for his own requirements. It is the duty of the villagers to collect things for him. His food and clothings are prepared at the expense of the villagers. When a guest comes into the village, his food is also brought by the village girls into the temple, where the guest resides.

In the matter of attending to a guest, they are not very particular and at times they are indifferent in matters of hospitality.

It can be said with confidence that in course of time they are sure to come out from their life of isolation and forsaking their savage habits, they will be true citizens of Independent India.

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THE PEOPLE OF KULADAN

WHAT a wonder house this world is, where we find various types of people in varieties of forms ! Each has a different complexion and different garments and there is nothing we can call common in their mode of living, food, and manners. What a different society and religious customs they have established ! It may be asked-why it has been so ? The main reason for this is the geographical position and the differences in climate prevailing in the respective lands. On geography depends the evolution of a race. Under its influence different peoples shaped themselves differently. These Kuladan people are a peculiar human race, about whom perhaps a few other than those of the neighbouring areas know any thing.

Before we know something of the evolution of their lives, we should first of all be acquainted with the geographical situation of the land. In fact, Kuladan is a big and famous river flowing down the Arakan Hills. Most of the land on both sides of the river are very fertile and people living there cultivate it with much advantage. As such, the river gets its water, principally from the rain falls, which pour in abundance in the hilly regions ; but it is not dried up during the summer and water is found in it perennially. The inhabitants in this area, about whom we want to speak now, consider the river as a holy one and show much reverence to it.

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These people are called '*Kumi*'. The word '*Kumi*' comes from the Arakanese language and the meaning it carries is '*Dog-man*'. Why are they called by this name ? There is an interesting history behind it, which we will narrate now. You must know that the inhabitants of this place consider the dog as a holy animal and they are accustomed to take its flesh even. The meat of dog is so palatable to them, that they prefer it to any other meat. Being meat eaters, they do not spare any bird or animal.

It is found that they are not in the habit of covering their body like us. They simply put a piece of cloth round their waist. Their womenfolk also keep their bodies almost naked. It appears that they are very indifferent in the art of wearing garments. The womenfolk are exceptionally strong and hardy. They do not stagger at all to lift heavy weights and easily they carry them from one place to another. Moreover, all the work of the fields is entrusted to them, because the menfolk have much else to do.

If their life history is studied, it will be known that perhaps there are no other tribes who are more lover of wars than these people. In fact, they play with life facing death every moment. In this territory, it may be observed that every village is guarded by its residents with arms against any surprise attack. The inhabitants are so quarrelsome that for a petty matter the whole village goes on fighting against another village and the fight does not stop till one side is completely defeated. Every village is always afraid that it may be attacked by the enemy. So bands of young men, in batches go on guarding the villages all the time. They cannot amicably settle their disputes. Without shedding of blood their souls cannot

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have rest. The warm blood flowing in their veins is always for an opportunity to fight against the enemy. Every house of the village resembles a miniature fort. They do not construct their houses in the valleys but on the top places from where they can keep a watch over their agricultural fields.

Their houses are not built of mud, bricks or stones, as are found in other places but they build them of timber and bamboos. There are reasons for that. They are so poor that they cannot even afford to have timber. Bamboos are found in plenty and are less costly. So, most of the houses are built of bamboos on weak foundation.

The '*Kumi*' people build their houses jointly around the court-yards of the respective villages. As such, the court-yard has only one main gate, which is built very strongly. Except this, there is no other out-let from the village. This main gate is built of strong wood, along which runs the fore-wall of the village which is a safeguard against any attack. Besides this, there is an Assembly Hall in every village, where the villagers meet occasionally to discuss their problems.

They have another type of houses on the top of the tall trees. They resemble the nests of birds. To some extent, these houses are stronger than their other houses on the ground. In these hanging houses they keep a good number of small holes, which play a great role at the time of warfare. Through these holes, they watch the enemies and fire at them when required. These houses are simply built as a measure of defence against enemy attacks. When they apprehend any attack, they gather weapons at

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the watch-posts and the defenders take positions to guard and protect the village. From the strategy point of view, these nest-like houses are quite useful in fighting back the enemy. These top-houses are so high that at places they are more than hundred feet above the ground. Usually ladders are used for the purpose of getting up and getting down and at the time of war, these can be drawn upwards before the enemy can destroy them.

Along with their old weapons, they also use modern instruments of war, for which they have the greatest liking. To possess those dangerous weapons, they never apply for any licence from the Govt. There are many reasons for that. These people are completely illiterate and there are many formalities to get a licence from the Govt. Moreover, they are so poor that they cannot even pay the licence fees. On the contrary, they cannot exist without weapons because their lives are full of dangers and perils. Every moment they are to face death, so to protect themselves, they must possess weapons under any circumstances. Secondly, they live in dense forests, far away from the cities where ordinary visitors cannot proceed a step even without any guide. Therefore, they are out of the reach of the Govt. servants. Although the Govt. has at present put restriction on them for possession of fire arms without licences, yet more than half the population of the *Kumi* tribe possesses fire arms without licences, escaping the notice of the Govt. servants.

At present they are far away from the civilized world and they do not know the advantages of living in a civilized society. So the present Govt. has taken steps to eradicate illiteracy from that area by spreading education.

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It is believed that if they can be educated on the right lines, they will surely give up their savage habits and will march forward on the road to progress. It can be said definitely that one day, the rays of civilization will brighten their lives and they will lead a life of happiness and contentment like the other citizens of India.

It is said that by nature these people are very proud and this has led them not to bow their heads before any body. They do not know how to walk stooping. The story runs that from their very childhood, mothers teach them to be mindful of their self-respect and personal honour and not to stoop before any body. This lesson of their parents influences them very much. They do not even stoop before their parents and elders, as is done in other parts of the country. When a boy is born, he is named according to their old custom. The mother of the boy binds a thread on the wrist of the child and gives blessings in the following words—'Oh, dear son, be a brave fighter. Everywhere earn reputation of your physical prowess and be victorious. Do not stoop your head before anybody.' This is not only the mother's blessings, even other elders give them similar blessings when occasion arises.

Being completely illiterate, these people are ignorant of the realities of life and from their childhood they do not care at all for the dangers of life. They are all the time ready to face any hazard including death. They have no toleration at all, so they die and make others die too, for a very insignificant matter. No opposition whether true or false, they can bear. Immediately, fierce fighting starts

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on and it is not stopped till one of them is completely eliminated. Life is very cheap for them and because of illiteracy, they are not hesitant to perform horrible acts. Although they are so savage and dangerous, yet they possess many special qualities, which show clearly that they had a glorious past.

There is a popular folk story prevalent among them, which tells about the origin of their race. They believe that in the beginning there was a God in the solar world who made the sun and the moon and at last this earth where man was destined to live. When the earth was created, God prepared two images made of limestone. When He completed the images, He felt asleep owing to tiredness. In the meantime, a wicked serpent came there and devoured the images seeing God asleep. When God woke up from sleep, He felt very sad for the missing images and could not trace out the reason of their disappearance. Again, He made two new images. As soon as He finished them, He felt asleep. The second time also, the serpent appeared and swallowed them. This time, getting up from sleep, He again found that the images were missing and became extremely mortified. Each time, He had to spend a whole day for making them and His results were fruitless, because, He could not save them from being swallowed by the serpent. At last, God thought of creating a watcher first, who could awake Him at the time of need. That was the only way by which the images could be protected. One day, He thought of creating an animal first, who would be very faithful to Him. So, He created first of all an animal called 'dog'. Then, He made two images, one of a man and another of a woman. This

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time, when He was asleep, the serpent appeared as usual to devour them but the dog was there to keep a watch and it began to bark aloud seeing the serpent approaching. As a result of the barking of the dog, God got up from His sleep and seeing Him the serpent became so frightened that it ran away never returning again. Then, putting life into the images God made them human beings from whom we all have sprung.

How peculiar and interesting is the creation of human beings according to them ! May be it is an imagination but it is based on good reasoning. This story is as good as the stories of any other civilized nations. Scholars of the present time admit that human beings are descendants of animals. Certainly, these people do not know the theory of human evolution but they agree that animals came first in the world, which bears testimony to the soundness of their folk tales.

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THE INHABITANTS OF THE ANDAMANS

THE Andamans are a group of islands in the heart of the Bay of Bengal. It is nearly eight hundred miles away from the city of Calcutta, but the City of Rangoon, the capital of Burma, is only 350 miles away. The biggest island of the Andamans is Port Blair, which has become very renowned in the history of India, because of its association with the revolutionaries of India. After the struggle for independence in 1857 was crushed, the British Govt. selected that place to incarcerate the prisoners in the isle of Port Blair. For this purpose, they constructed a fort-like jail which has been known as the Cellular Jail of the Andamans. Henceforth, all the revolutionary prisoners of India, including the prisoners of the Thurwardy Rebellion of Burma were deported to that jail. It has also been a place for banishment of prisoners sentenced to transportation for life.

Previously, during the rule of the British, a British garrison was kept here permanently and a Chief Commissioner ran the administration of the islands. A small isle, called Ross, was the Headquarters of the Chief Commissioner. It being in the midst of the sea with mountain ranges, the Andamans present a very exquisite scenic beauty. But its climate is absolutely unsuitable for human habitation. The place being near the Equator, it has extreme heat resulting in constant evaporation and excessive downpour of rain. It has the second highest rainfall in

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India after Cherrapunji, in Assam. Its beauty lies in its forest wealth, which nature has given in abundance.

Much is not known about the early residents of this area. It has not yet been possible to trace out the ancestors of the present aboriginal people living in this island. Some say, that they are a portion of the tribal people of South China, but it is not known how they were able to come over to this place, under what circumstances and at what time.

Scholars are of different opinions about these people. Some say that they were formerly a section of the trading community of Southern China, who perhaps were shipwrecked near the islands or their means of transports were all destroyed owing to some natural calamities, thus making it impossible for them to return to their homeland.

Another opinion is that these people might have been driven out from their own homeland by some superior race, who came there from outside and thus, they were thrown over to find out a place for their living. Somehow, they came here and lived for ages in the dark caves of these islands.

Whatever might be the ancient history, it is a fact that in their mode of living there can be found no traces of any civilized life and their backwardness is so glaring that it cannot be taken that they had a civilized past like the other tribal people of India. They are living completely like savages. They do not exhibit that they had a glorious past and they have no religion or belief like other peoples.

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Historians say that at different times many civilized missionaries have come here to put them on the road to progress and civilization but everyone of them went back meeting with failure. The Buddhist religion which penetrated far and wide into many parts of South East Asia, could not get any foothold on these islands. After that, years went on and people of India also did not keep much notice of these islands. It was only after the conquest of India by the Britishers that Archibald Blair occupied these islands and established the township of Port Blair, in the Andamans. He considered the place to be an outpost for the protection of the British Empire in the East, from where ships, both men-of-war and merchantships were to get material for refuelling. From that day, the history of the development of the Andamans began, although nothing spectacular happened in its process. Yet, it was a beginning, no-doubt.

In fact, when the Britishers turned the islands of the Andamans into an outpost and kept a garrison there, after building a township, the aboriginals moved into the forests and never came out in presence of the outsiders. The result was that they became more savage and barbarous. The authorities tried their best to tame them but these people responded always with their bow and arrows. The struggle went on for a considerable period. At last, the authorities gave up their attempt to harrass them and allowed them to live in peace in the jungles. There are records that these aborigines sometime killed civilized people who had been there on official duty or as travellers. At times, they have been termed as man eaters but the authenticity of this view has not been reliably ascertained.

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During the Second World War, both the Andamans and Nicobar islands went under the occupation of the Indian National Army and was named as Subhas Dweep, in honour of the name of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, the most gallant fighter for India's war of Independence. At present, the Andamans have been turned into a big rehabilitation centre for the uprooted Hindu minorities of East Pakistan, who had to migrate to India. It is now a centrally administered area, with a right of sending an elected member to the Indian Parliament. Reports say that the whole face of the main island has been greatly changed by the creative skill of the uprooted humanity who had to leave their hearth and home for good. Thus, the Andamans have become a homeland for a new people who are to-day engaged to build a new India by their sweat and toil.

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THE PEOPLE OF MINICOY ISLAND

THE Minicoy island is situated in the Arabian Sea, thirtyfive miles away from the Malabar coast of India. The celebrated Laccadive is in the north of this island. The area of this isle is only three square miles. It is a long strip of land whose length is six miles and breadth half a mile. Its shape looks like a fish and its shores are all covered by plenty of coconut trees. Coconuts are the only wealth of this isle, on which depend the inhabitants for their bread and butter. There is nothing else produced here.

There are only four thousand residents in this small island. Out of them, nearly one thousand inhabitants dwell in the port of Malabar, working as loaders of ships in the port. There is only one area where the people live. It resembles a village of three or four thousand inhabitants. But there is one thing of great significance that none is illiterate here like our villagers in the mainland. Here every villager can read and write and women are far more advanced in this respect.

Here, women are very powerful socially and in a word, it can be said that they rule over the menfolk. In fact, they hold that position as men hold in the northern Indian society. It may be said without any contradiction that these Minicoy women are more free than any other women of the world.

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This place is very peaceful and hardly one comes across a beggar here. Every person seems to be very happy. They do not give any value to money and it is said that they consider earth more valuable than wealth. They do not produce anything else, except coconuts and that is perhaps the only proof that they are not at all after money.

The system of marriage of these people is very peculiar. The practice of early marriage is quite prevalent, still a girl has every right to select her own suitor. They do not perform the marriage ceremony like us. There, the girl goes out to marry taking a party with her to the boy's house and after the marriage is over, she brings the boy along with her and keeps him in her own house. The boy has to give up his parents' company after he is married by a girl. The girl as usual lives with her family, taking her husband with her. The boy cannot leave that house before he is dead. The girl is considered to be the natural inheritor of her father's property. The sons have no right in this field. Whatever they possess that comes out of their wives' shares. The boy has also to change his surname after his marriage following the surname of his wife's family. In a word, they follow the matriarchal line of social structure. Here the whole relationship of men and women are reverse to that seen in other parts of the world.

Here the womenfolk are better educated than the menfolk. Men are not very interested in literacy and education. Women teach their children in every house from their childhood. They are all Muslims by religion, still they do not observe any purdah system like

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other Muslim women of our country. Moreover, they are quite intelligent and advanced type of people and are not in any way lagging behind in smartness and intellect.

In matters of city life, women have a special place. In every important posts women are selected by popular vote. But the most interesting thing to observe is that although women are very active in political and social life of the country, yet they do not neglect their household work at all. They perform almost all the duties of a woman with devotion and responsibility. They have not forsaken their primary task of bringing up children and becoming an ideal wife inspite of the fact that they are one of the most free women of the world. They have an organisation of their own which discusses their problems of family, social and other political matters. Following the examples of the women, men also have organised an assembly of their own to discuss about their own problems. As regards their mutual quarrels, they do not take assistance of the court. On the contrary, they ususally abide by the decision of the village panchayat in the matter.

A hospital, a school and a wireless station have been installed by the Govt. in recent years. Moreover, a protection police force always keeps watch on this frontier of India. These forces are employed by the Defence Department of the Government and they do not interfere in the day to day life of the people.

In the southernmost part of the island, a light house was erected, nearly ninty years ago, by the British Government to indicate route to the ocean going vessels. The height of this post is 150 feet. This post has been taken

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over by our Government recently from the British hands.

The trade of these people is carried on through barter system, so money transaction is not seen in the commodity market. Like ancient times, commodities are exchanged and there is no trade running like other parts of country.

The most spectacular thing to be observed here is their love for cleanliness. From childhood they teach this art of cleanliness to their children and nowhere one can see any dirt and accumulation of rubbish. One who does not observe this cleanliness and is found to violate the rules is severely punished by law.

These people know the arts of swimming, boat racing and dancing, which are mostly their pastimes. All of them are experts in these lines.

It has been said that coconuts are the only wealth of this area but it cannot give bread to every inhabitant of the land. So they go to catch fish in the sea. The greatest hindrance against the growing of coconuts is created by the rats of the area. These rats are so dangerous that they destroy bunches of coconuts on the trees, thus creating a most difficult situation for the people. Naturally, they have to earn a substantial income from fishing. They are experts in building fishing boats of timber and it has been seen that their boats can go far out on the sea for fishing for weeks together. In one trip they can catch a considerable quantity of fish which may fetch them a handsome amount. This is their only source of income in addition to the earnings from coconuts.

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In fact, they live upon hard physical labour withstanding many discomforts of life. Their story is an interesting part of the history of our country, because they stand there, as sentinals, to watch against any intrusion of enemy from outside. They are the vanguard of our outposts. They are serving the country and the people by their selfless duty and devotion without any grudge and bickerings of heart. We, every Indian, are proud of them.

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THE SANTHALS

THE Santhals are considered to be one of the largest tribes in India, comprising nearly twenty five lacs of population. They are from the State of Bihar, but now they have spread out in different parts of the country. In West Bengal and Assam many of them serve as labourers in the tea–gardens and are carrying on this profession for many decades.

It is known from historical sources that at first these people were the residents of Ramgarh area. In the eighteenth century a great famine occured in that area owing to the failure of seasonal rainfall. The result was that thousands of people died of hunger and want. That devastating famine drove these people from their original home and they fled away to the hilly regions of the Ranchi district of Bihar. Now-a-days thousands of them work in the factories as wage earners, mostly in Tatanagar, the industrial town of Bihar.

There are different opinions about their origin and ancestors. Studying their physical features, it cannot be said that they are descendants of the Aryans. Perhaps they are the sons and daughters of the Dravidians who are said to be the original inhabitants of India.

The complexion of the Santhals is tanned black. Like other aboriginals they also are used to keep their

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body partially covered. But now-a-days, living in cities and towns, the urban influences have made them dress conscious. Still they are habituated to keep the body mostly uncovered. Men wear simply a small piece of cloth. When they go to some social festivity or function, they wear a coat and sometimes put a turban on their head. Women also wear a small cloth, one part of which cover the upper part of their body. They are not in the habit of wearing blouse or any other type of kurta. They are not fond of ornamats to decorate their bodies. Inspite of this, one can see their traditional jewelleries on their bodies. But one thing is sure that they live very simple life and decorate themselves mostly with nature's gifts, such as flowers and creepers.

The Santhals lead a very hard life. By physical labour they earn two square meals. There is one virtue in them that they always smile in their sweat. Whatever may be the amount of labour they do, they are not at all disatisfied with the work, nor with themselves. That is their chief characteristic of life, which is very different from the modern civilised world. It is apparent from seeing them that perhaps God has given them happiness, peace, and contentment in abundance. Even in difficulty they put on smiles, as if they cannot live without it.

The Santhals are very fond of playing flutes which are made of bamboos. It is a passion with them and wherever they may be, working or resting, flutes are always with them. When they tend their cattle in the forest and play their flutes, it creates such an atmosphere that even the sylvan goddesses are enchanted to listen to those sweet

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pipings. While they are in merriment, they dance along with the tune of their pipes. Women also participate in dances with men. During the Spring festival they practically become maddened with enthusiasm to celebrate the occasion by dances and songs. In fact, songs and dances play a great role in their social life.

Their social customs are also very peculiar. Their marriages are arranged not as ours. When they find a suitable boy for their girl, they send a proposal to the boy's house. But the search for the boy is not made like us, nor their parents are much worried for it. The parents simply contact their relations and tell them to find out a suitable candidate for their girl and they leave everything on them. When the groom is found and the parents of the respective parties agree to have the marriage performed, the boy and girl are allowed to go to a fixed place to have their own choice. They see each other and approve the marriage proposal.

When the girl agrees, the preliminary arrangements are made for the marriage ceremony. The respective parents purchase some quantity of parched rice and exchange it between the houses. By this process the marriage proposal is confirmed by the respective parties. After that the parents of the boy send an amount to the girl's house which is divided among the parents and other near relations. Then the marriage date is fixed, and the boy reaches the girl's house with a party.

When the groom's party reaches the girl's house there begins a dance which is very famous among the

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Santhals. In this dance only the groom's party participates. The whole atmosphere creates such a noise, that it seems as if a great battle is going on between two warring parties. This revelry goes on for quite a long time in the house of the bride. This is the first social performance of the marriage ceremony of the Santhals. Then women of the girl's side begin their dances. The dances are not of orderly style. There are much exuberances and outbursts of anarchic feelings and movements of limbs. After this the bride and the groom are brought before the assembly of persons who have gathered on the occasion. Here there is no system of keeping the bride's face covered in a scarf as is seen in other parts of the country. Then starts the function of putting vermilion on the forehead of the girl.

They have a social practice that no boy or girl before he or she attains 25 and 20 years respectively, can marry. When a son is born, the occasion is a great function and observed with dances and songs. Then comes the shaving ceremony of the boy when he is grown up. It is very interesting to note that at every stage of life a man passes through a social function which is observed with great festivity and merriment. Perhaps for this reason they are so happy and gay people.

The ceremony of the dead is also of a strange type. The burning etc., are like that of the Hindus. After three days of the burning of the body, they perform the function of throwing the dead man's bones into the river. Generally the eldest son of the dead one takes the bones to throw into the river Damodar, which flows near their

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area. This rite is performed in a very peculiar way. The son who carries the urn, goes down to the river and puts the urn on his head. For some time he prays for the salvation of his dead father. Then he dips into the water and the urn is washed away. Getting up from the water he returns home along with others who go to attend the function.

To the Santhals, the river Damodar is very sacred. They consider the river as a deliverer of sins. They believe that all the sins of a man are washed away if he takes a bath in its water once. By throwing the ashes of a dead man into its water, they expect that the dead soul will get salvation and peace. The funeral ceremony is attended by all the friends and relations of the dead and a feast is also arranged. A religious function in the nature of chanting *mantras* and recitations is also arranged on the occasion.

Like the Hindus, they are also in the habit of respecting the cow as Goddess. There is cow worship function among them which is performed every year with much pomp and grandeur. They call this function as '*Shoharam*' in their own language. This is one of their great festivals. The priests or the pandits among their community select the day for the performance of the festival. Throughout the whole night they remain awake and on the next morning they all go to the nearby river to take a community bath.

They live mainly on agriculture and rearing of animals. In every village there is a headman who exercises a great influence over the residents. There are Panchayats also

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who deal with disputes of the villagers and look to the well-being of the village from the community's interest. They usually grow rice in their fields with the implements of plough and throwing seeds mostly. They are considered to be the best cleaners of jungles in India.

Education is practically absent among them. Their simplicity of life and behaviour are exemplary. They have very few demands in life and they are very contented with themselves.

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THE ORAON PEOPLE

THE land of the Oraons is situated in the South Western part of Bihar, where flows down the great river Son, comprising the hilly areas of the districts of Ranchi, Hazaribagh and others. The whole area is surrounded by dense forests through which flow two rivers, named Subarnarekha and Koyal, increasing the scenic beauty of the place. This area is wonderful from the nature's view point and the climate of the place is considered to be very good for health.

Different aboriginals live here but of them Oraons are the most important one. Historians are of the opinion that originally these people did not belong to this place. Their original home was near the river Tungabhadra, in the Rohtas-khand. It is said that the city of Kishkindhya which is mentioned in the Ramayana, was also a place near about that site. But it is not known why and when these people came out of their original home and took shelter in this hilly region. There is one story that a powerful Aryan army made a surprise attack upon them, when they were all in revelry and merriment. Many of them were butchered and the few that were saved somehow, secretely left their place and came here. The whole of Rohtas-khand was occupied by the Aryan warriors. To save their lives these defeated people had to settle down in this dense forest and as a result were

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called by the name of the new land. Oh, what labour they had to put in to make the new land habitable ! Day after day, by clearing the jungle, they made their homes and agricultural fields and also had to fight constantly against ferocious animals who roamed in packs in the forests. In any case, it is seen that fate made them live here in a small area, when the new-comers, the Aryans, conquered land after land and expanded their territory.

There are many who say that these people are descendants of King Shugrib of the Ramayana, who was the king of the Vanars, the followers of Ramchandra, the legendary hero of ancient India. Historians have also researched on this matter a lot and have confirmed this view. It is also said that there are many things in the life of these people that give evidences to this idea. Inspite of their not keeping any relation with the descendants of the Aryans, these people worship Ramchandra and his wife Janki, with as much devotion as was done by the great disciple of Ramchandra, Hanuman. The very word 'Ram' is very respectful to them and by its utterences they derive a tremendous mental strength and they cannot tolerate any insult towards this word.

There is one important thing to be noticed that although they are not descendants of the Aryans, yet they worship all the Gods and Goddesses of the Hindus. Lord Siva, Bishnu and Brahma etc. are held in great regard by these people and they worship these Gods with devotion and veneration. They depend on these Gods to get relief in their distress and sufferings.

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It is further known that their real ancestors were the Dravadians of the Dravirland. These Dravadians are completely different from the Aryans in social customs and manners, in their mode of living and in their religious beliefs. Inspite of that, these Oraons, though they are of Dravadian origin, consider themselves as the descendants of the Aryans and a part of the Hindu religion. From this it can be seen that their forefathers were of the clan of Shugriv, the king of the Vanars, referred to in the Ramayana. Moreover, the Aryans called all ancient people of this land either Rakshasa or Vanars, with whom they had to wage wars to capture the whole land. So, there is nothing untoward in it if they are called the descendants of the Vanars, the devoted followers of Ramchandra, the legendery figure of India.

In ancient times, the persons who were meat eaters were considered demons or Rakshasas. They lived as savages in the jungles and drank wine for intoxication. They were not at all civilized and were not at all under any obligation of performing any social duties. No refined feeling of affection developed within their hearts. Like mere beasts they were after womenfolk. They knew simply to feed their stomach and beyond that they had no idea, nor any inclination to know anything. So when the Aryans first came to this land, they found many such uncivilized people and gave them different names according to their appearances and habits.

Their principal occupation and means of livelihood is agriculture but it is so insufficient that they have to live as slaves under the money lenders and the zamindars from whom they have to take occasional loans to fill

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their stomach. As a result they are very poor and illiterate and are exploited by those rich classes to the extent that they can never improve their economic condition. It is very strange that with the tremendous labour they produce foodstuffs in the fields but they cannot enjoy the benefit of it and all goes to the grannery of the rich persons. It is seen that since the days of the Mughal rule in India, this Zamindar class became a parasite of the society, who lived upon the labour of common exploited people. This right of exploitation they got from the Emperor, whom they had betrayed the country, when he invaded the land. In fact, the Zamindars were given land for their service to the king of the land. This class of people, naturally, always supported the vested interests and thus helped to keep the common people in bonds for all the time.

Here most of the Zamindars are of Bihar, who consider themselves as lords over these poor people. In fact, these people are very simple and innocent. Their garments are also very ordinary, because they are so poor that they cannot afford to have any costly covering on their bodies. A small piece of cloth is all they wrap round their waist. The same is the practice with their women who rarely cover the upper part of their bodies, which is the common practice with all the women of the world. But the womenfolk decorate their bodies with old fashioned ornaments of different metals. Mostly they keep their hair loose and hanging at the back with a knot at the end.

These people are dark complexioned with robust health. Moreover their skin is so smooth that it has a fine grace of its own. The most astounding fact of their life

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is their hard labour. They go on labouring till the work is finished to the end. They all work as wage earners, carrying loads from one place to another and at times, walking twenty to twenty five miles with loads on their backs.

The womenfolk do not observe any purdah. In marriage, only the physical aspect of the bride and groom is considered. It is said that a bride who does not know the art of climbing on a tree cannot get married in their society. If she is somehow married, when her disqualification is revealed, she is given up by the husband. The system of polygamy and polyandry both are in practice in their society. They have a superstition that a married woman should sow seeds in the field because that is considered to be very auspicious.

They are also very fond of dance and songs like almost all other tribal people of India. In the life of the tribal people this is the only diversion they can enjoy without any expenses which they cannot afford at all. Although their dances are of old style and of a bit blunt type, yet it has that charm of pleasing the populace by its lively performances. Many of their songs are of their ancient stories of chivalry and brave deeds. The delicacy of their songs equally pars with their sweetness. Their songs are always accompanied by dances. Both male and female sing and dance together.

For the education of the children, every village has a site, where the boys and girls gather every day to take oral lessons from teachers engaged for the purpose. It is said that they have a literature of their own, but a very few of them are literate to read and derive any advantage from it.

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THE PEOPLE OF PANGI AREA

THE Pangi territory is situated between Kashmir and Jogindernagar of Himachal States. It being a mountainous area is surrounded by forests all around. These forests are full of tall trees of exceptional beauty and of rare wealth. Owing to this, the rainfall is quite heavy throughout the year.

This territory remains practically covered by snow during the winter season and its transport and communication are closed during those days. The winter becomes so severe that at times one cannot see even a bird or beast in the land. Wherever one looks, sheets of white snows are only visible. In fact, the place is full of perils, yet it is very surprising that people have reached here also to settle down. One cannot say what wandering spirit brought men to come to this place, where they build their abode. It is, of course, a fact that in course of time men are acclimatised to every type of climate and atmosphere. So, these people also have been living here in the midst of cold and snow with a spirit of glee and happiness. There is no doubt about it that the life of these people is very hard and difficult, still they are clinging to this place since a long time and they never think of leaving this place and going to another site. Here the climate is such that one can work only for four months during the year. They have to spend the remaining eight months sitting

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idle inside the house, when snow storms and blizzards blow over the land.

Most of the residents of Pangi are of Brahmin or Rajput caste. Historians say that in fact these people are the descedants of the ancient Aryans but owing to some forces of circumstances they had to come here and settle down. The natural beauties of the place, perhaps enchanted them. They could not leave this land of nature's wonders and so became permanent residents. Gradually they became isolated from the civilized world and lost the track of progress which other Indians in other parts were treading in the process of their development. The result was that they knew nothing of the outside world and remained happy with this small world of their own creation.

As such the territory looks to be very deserted. The roads are so difficult to cross that at places it creates an alarm in the mind of visitors. The local people are of course experts in carrying loads along with other beasts of burdens. At different places there are many springs and small brooks flowing on creating murmuring sounds of wonderful music. The waters of those springs are considered to be full of minerals and possessing curative properties. Such water makes one healthy and strong if one drinks it for some weeks at a stretch.

From the month of June upto October, these people find time for work. During those days thay have to gather their own food and fodder for their animals. They have to accumulate it then, for the winter season, when they cannot go out and work at all. Before the month of

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October is over, clouds begin to gather in the sky and soon the rains come down, bringing snow in their wake. Then the whole land is covered with a white sheet and roads become blocked, and unusable. Piles of snow are accumulated throughout the whole field and no work can be done.

Here women are fairer and stronger than men. Menfolk seem to be weaker than women in appearances. Like other hill tribes they also do not take their bath, nor even clean their bodies in any other way. They are mostly followers of Hindu religion but they also honour Buddhism like their own religion. The result is that side by side with their own Gods and Goddesses they also worship Lord Buddha. Perhaps they are the only people in the whole world who worship and follow two religions. They perform all the religious function with much pomp and grandeur, but their methods of worship are quite different from ours. It does not mean that they are less faithful to religion than us, rather one should be surprised to see their reverence and respects to God. It is also inspiring to see them to be so devoted to religion and to good rules of life. Perhaps this is so, for their being so far away from the so called civilized world.

The garments of these people are also very strange and of a peculiar type. Men usually wear one pyjama or something like that and put a cap of black colour on head. In winter, they of course wear warm clothes.

The dress of the ladies is quite different from that of men. They wear tight frock and tight pyjama and usually have a scarf wrapped around their waist. They are also fond of ornaments. They are not very foppish but their

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simple dresses make them very attractive. They always bear a smiling face. Although they have to work hard in the fields and homes, yet they are always found to be very jolly and spirited. In the dense forests they go to collect wood in groups and sing sweet songs, which even the sylvan nymphs find pleasing to the ear.

These Pangi people have no literature of their own because they are all illiterate and uneducated, but their folk songs and the rural old stories prove that once they must have had a very glorious past. It is true that they have forgotten their ancient glories but there are many things which more than signify that they are not altogether lost in the lurch.

Here the system of communication is very unreliable because the climate is uncertain and perilous. The Postal services are irregular. The Govt. of India has recently opened many Post Offices in different parts of the territory. The letters which reach there are not for the local people but for the persons who are working in the Forest Department. As such, the local people are absolutely illiterate and moreover, they do not go out of their own area. These people are at times found to be completely ignorant about India also. The big cities like Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay, etc., are not known to them. But one thing is sure that even a child of the area knows about the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi.

They do not know the Hindustani language. Their language is a local one and is a vulgarised form of Sanskrit, and Pali. If they are taught Sanskrit, they can learn it

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very easily and assimilate the teachings of the language for their own benefit.

There are many among them who preserve boiled meat for the winter season, because in those days they cannot dream of going out and bringing meat for their food. Normally they are very religious persons and hate bloodshed and wars. But they take meat simply for the reason that within the four working months of the year they cannot procure sufficient quantity of food for their consumption during the cold days. Otherwise, they consider killing as a great crime. But they are helpless to observe that spirit because of the scarcity of food. They consider meat eating as bad but they have a belief that if by killing an animal the meat is distributed among others, the sins of the cruel act are also distributed among others. So whenever they eat meat, they are to share it with others positively. They may eat other things separately, but not meat and this practice is being observed by them for a long time.

There is a round hill in the north of this territory, which they consider to be an auspicious one. They believe that God Siva lives on that hill. When they are in trouble, everyone goes on praying to Lord Siva facing that particular hill and entreating Him to save them from the impending danger. They have a great faith in this hill. The special feature of this hill is that it is never seen to be without snow. Always it looks like a sheet of white silk. For this reason none could take any snap of this hill upto this day. The place remains always covered with white clouds.

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In the ancient books of India this hill has been referred to as Kailasha and it has been worshipped by all the Indians since times immemorial. The appearance of this hill resembles the phallic stone which the Hindus of India worship. Many pilgrims come to Pangi during the summer season to visit this hill as an act of religious devotion. Those pilgrims consider the Pangi people very fortunate being near this great mountain which is the abode of God Siva. Many climbers tried to reach this hill but till now none could do it. People believe that only pious and great souls can climb it. But so far none has been successful whatever the efforts.

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THE BHOT PEOPLE

IT is a land of snow, where the Southern Tibet touches the Northern point of India. Here snow-storms blow over the land for almost the whole year. It is a land which is predominantly covered by dense forests and full of rocky soil. It is not an exaggeration to say that the land is not at all conducive to human living. But it is very astonishing to find that even in this place, where food is scarce and living is not an easy affair through ordinary labour people have settled down since long. One cannot say why these people settled down here and under what expectation they are still living on ! What enchants them there that they do not leave this place for some better one ?

The Bhot territory is situated just on the north of the Kumaon province. The people of this area are called Bhotia. Their chief occupation is tending of sheep and cattle. They live in villages but it is very strange that they do not possess any house of their own. They move from one place to another continuously. Their main articles of trade are wool, borax, cuminseed, asafoetida and sheep. Though they buy and sell these to earn their livelihood, yet they live in constant want and poverty.

During the cold season when snow storms blow over their land, they leave the place and come down to the

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plains taking their sheep and goats along with them. In the new place also they do their own business. But when in the summer snows of the mountains begin to melt away, they return to their own homeland. Again after the summer when winter comes, they again come down. Their lives are more or less like those of the Jars of the Himalayas but their social customs are different.

Being the people of the land of snow, their complexion is milky white but they are very dirty because they do not take bath regularly. It is said that if they take a bath once in a year, that is a great event in their life.

In appearances they resemble the people of Tibet. Their dresses are like those of the Indians but occasionally they also dress themselves in Tibetan costumes. The menfolk wear Kurta upto the knees. On their heads they wear caps of Tibetan fashion or sometimes a peculiar type of turban. The dresses of the womenfolk are also likewise but to cover their heads they use a scarf or a piece of cloth. They are in the habit of wearing big rings on ears and noses. Bangles and heavy necklaces are also their favourite ornaments.

There are many interesting stories current about the origin of these people. Many of them believe that they are the direct descendants of God Ram Chandra of Oudh. It is a fact that they observe some social customs which were prevalent in the society of the clan of Ram Chandra. The inhabitants of this place prefer to maintain their relation only with the Kshatriya people. They say that Kshatriyas were the only people of the Ganges Valley. Whatever might be their origin it is more than sure that

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their original homes were not in the hills of Kumaon. It is always found that forced by circumstances people perform miracles and even surmount innumerable obstacles for their survival.

Of all social customs, their marriage system is very peculiar. There is no compulsion for the boys and girls to marry according to the choice of their parents. In this matter boys and girls are absolutely free to have their own choice. They marry according to their will. Though there comes no obstruction regarding this from their parents, yet they duly secure their permission before the marriage is held. After the marriage is settled, the boy sends some money through a friend or a servant to the parents of the girl, with the proposal. Then the parents have to decide whether the boy is suitable or not, lest the girl should be deceived in life. But it is seen that the parents do not usually object to the selection of their respective children and give their consent whole heartedly.

If the groom is suitable, the parents of the girl send their consent to the boy's proposal and on an auspicious day they fix the marriage. On that day the boy comes to the house of the girl taking a party of friends and relatives. Without performing any ceremony, the groom takes away the girl placing her in a palanquin. While the groom takes away the bride, the bride's party waits on the road to obstruct their departure. There they organise a mock-fight, where the party of the girl is eventually defeated and the boy proceeds as a victorious hero. After reaching home, within eight or ten days' time the groom's party sends a messenger to the girl's

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house with the following solacing words, to her father: 'God's will is fulfilled. Why do you feel sad ? She is your daughter and the boy who stole and married her is also a son to you. So, forget the past and bless them.' This system reminds us of the old social customs of India.

On receiving the message from the house of the boy the parents of the girl, her relations, friends, brothers and sisters, all go together to the boy's house. On their arrival there the marriage is celebrated. The girl's party gives their blessings to the boy and the girl. On this occasion, a grand feast is arranged and the whole function continues for one month. Every family of the village arranges a party for the newly married couple on separate days and wine is consumed like water. The functions comprise dances and songs throughout the whole village and it becomes very difficult to locate the house in which the marriage has been held. When after a full month. the function is over, the boy offers some money to his mother-in-law from his own pocket as a farewell gift to the girl's party. The money which is given to the mother, is considered to be the price of the milk which the mother had fed to her daughter in childhood.

The funeral ceremony of these people is very simple. The rituals performed by the relations of the dead man for his salvation are very peculiar, and interesting. On the lunar day of the month in which man dies, they all go near a pond or a spring and plant some saplings and go on watering those for at least ten days.

These people worship Lord Siva and the Serpent

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God. On all auspicious occasions they worship them as religious acts. They are illiterate and cannot read and chant the mantras from the Holy books but their veneretion and devotion in worshipping Gods are very noteworthy. Tibet, which is considered to be the centre of Buddhism could not influence these people and they all remained adherents of Hinduism from the ancient times. This proves that these people possess a great faith in their religion and they could not be lured away to change their faiths.

The special feature of their character is that they consider material wealth not so important as their honour. So theft is not heard at all in their land. They do not lock their houses. There are many who have not known the use of lock and key and their utility. However valuable an article may be and wherever it may be lying, none will touch it. Mostly they live in tents, where all the articles remain open but nobody ever takes them away. Such is the tradition they have developed and still maintain in their society, which appears to us like that of the fairy tales.

In every village they have an assembly-hall. It occupies a great place in the social life of these people. In the evening, youngmen and women of the village assemble in the hall and mix freely. The unmarried boys and girls mostly select their respective partners of life from this assembly meetings. Here every villager gets some recreation and entertainment to carry on their drab and dry life. The main thing they do there is dancing along with the beating of drums. Pairs dance in turn

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for the entertainment of the assembled audience. Wine and tobacco are consumed in great quantity. This is their daily evening routine of life.

When any body from outside comes in the village, he is kept in this assembly hall. If he is offered any other accomodation that is taken as an insult to the whole community. They do not think it proper to keep a friend in the family. They consider hospitality as a privilege and always take much pains to look after the comforts of a guest.

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A JAR WOMAN

–By Courtesy
K. M. VAID

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THE JARS

IN the north of India, where the Jar Ganga river flows down from the central part of Tibet to the Tehri-Garhwal, lives, the Jar clan. It is a place where snows keep the land covered for the long winter months, because the altitude of the place is more than 11,000 ft. The climate of the area is very dry and life is very hard. At some places, there are found some cultivable lands, otherwise, it is all rocky. The roads of the area are very steep and dangerous and at every step there is risk for the pedestrians.

There are many types of people who live here but Rajputs, Jars and Kolios are found in large numbers. The Rajputs are the most respected in the land. They keep themselves isolated from others by observing a caste supremacy. They do not take any food prepared by others, nor they arrange any marriages with other communities of the land.

Whatever might be the position of other communities, the greatness of the Jar people excels all others. It is said that these Jars were formerly inhabitants of Tibet. Historians say that previous to their habitation in Tibet, they were living in India but owing to some forces of circumstances, they had to leave their motherland and wandering here and there at last reached Tibet where they settled

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down. Then, there came a time, when the Tibetans began to oppress them. Disappointed they had to come back to the border of India and settled near the territory of Tehri-Garhwal. Henceforth, the river of the area which flows by this territory is called Jar Ganga after their name.

They do not build any houses for them. Mostly, they prefer to live in caves or in temporary that ched huts. In fact, they are a wandering people by habits and cannot stick to one place. As a practice, even now they spend at least eight months of the year outside their place of habitation. Their main profession is commerce but a good number of them live on beggary. Tending of cattle and goats are done by almost all of them and that is the only wealth they possess.

There are many among them whose profession is simply begging. These beggars travel to distant parts of their own country and even to many other neighbouring states for begging purposes. It is interesting to note that during summer they all come back to their own land because they cannot bear the heat of the plains. It is not owing to their idleness that they turn to begging but it is the circumstances that force them to this profession. Otherwise, they are very hard-working people.

A big section among them earn their livelihood by trading. During the summer they go towards Tibet and from there purchase wool, salt, horses and donkeys etc., and bring them to their own country. During the tilling season, they work in the fields and after the harvest is over, there begins the winter. In the winter, they go down to Hardwar, Hrishikesh and other parts of the plains to

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sell off those commodities they had brought from Tibet. When summer approaches they return to Tibet for purchasing fresh articles. In this way, year after year, passes on for them.

Although they carry on trade, yet they are very poor and their business does not give them enough to live comfortably. The reason is that their business is a very costly affair and as a result they cannot save anything to accumulate. So, they have to live very economically because they cannot afford to be lavish. In case they do, they will starve. To carry loads, they employ sheep and goats. Packing commodities in small bags, they hang them on both sides of the animals. The donkeys can carry at least two to three maunds of load at a time. Their travels are quite interesting. All the members of the family, putting the loads on the back of the beast of burden move from one place to another. At nightfall they pitch their tents near some village in the open and at dawn they are again on the move.

Mostly their garments are made of woollen cloth but on festival days, they wear gorgeous dresses of velvet and silk. On those days, wearing beautiful dresses when they sit in their shops it brings more colour to the fair and they look like rich people. In fact, they spend their life in great hardships. They have no other means by which they can live well. So they have to labour hard simply to live on. This is the reason why they are so poor.

They eat very simple food. Rice with pulses and non-vegetarian diet, they prefer more, though meat also forms a part of their food. Their land being a cold country,

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they also take wine. The women also share it with men and there is no social prohibition against it. They call wine 'sura' in that part. They also take tea in great quantity but its preparation is a peculiar process there. At every dawn they prepare tea. While the water boils they mix tea leaves in it. When the tea extract has been taken out by the water after a considerable time of boiling they filter it to another ware. Then they mix butter and salt with it and make it like a 'shake'. Then they consider it to be fit for consumption. Throughout the whole day they take tea and their furnaces remain always burning and the water boiling.

Being the inhabitants of hill area, their features are small in size but the complexion is fair and they possess robust health. The womenfolk are extremely beautiful and pretty. Even in ordinary dressess, they attract the attention of others. While walking or working in the fields, they sing merry songs. Their sweet voice is really enchanting. The womenfolk are very laborious and before the rise of the sun they finish almost all the household work. They are not comfort loving or late risers. If they do like that, they will not be able to feed themselves. So, they can never be indolent. Every day they go to work even before the dawn.

The womenfolk never gossip idly. Even in their leisure period they do something or the other. Mostly they remain busy in wool threads, clearing of it and knitting it. They perform these works so skilfully that they excel the best workers in the art of this line. The children are also a helping hand to them in their work. The children do

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not waste their time simply playing in the streets. They assist their parents in every manner they can. Those are their play and games of diversion. They knit blankets, woollen wrappers and other warm garments as people of the hill areas require them in large numbers. Moreover, they also sell those articles in foreign markets while on their travel.

Owing to their travels to different parts of different lands, their language has also taken a peculiar shape. Principally their dialects are Tibetan, Jari and Hindi and almost all of them can speak in those three languages. It is very surprising that these people being absolutely illiterate can speak in many dialects.

To get education is an impossible affair for them. They do not live at a fixed place permanently and to educate a roving people is very difficult. But our Govt. is now making determined efforts to make them stick to fixed residences and also to literate them. It is not yet known how far the efforts have been successful. It is more than a certainty that once they are educated they will be one of the best commercial classes of our country. But who knows what is hidden in the womb of the future !

About their dress it may be said that they usually wear long wollen garments. The womenfolk do not observe any purdah but use a small scarf to cover their heads. The practice of using shoe is found here but their shoes are not made of leather. Those are of flax and jute which are very light in weight. It can be seen that the imprint of modern style has also fallen on them, because quite a good percentage of them now-a-days wear

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trousers and coats. In this front the ladies also do not lag behind in taste. They have also begun to dress themselves in salwar and kurtas of embroidered varieties. They are fond of jewellery of gold and silver both. They usually braid their hair in many plaits and the poorest of the poor even use flowers for decoration. They take it to be a sign for expression of happiness. They think that without flowers a woman's adornment remains incomplete. Though they are illiterate, yet their aesthetic senses are very acute and of high order.

Smoking and drinking are quite prevalent among them. Their floating state of affairs is one of the reasons why they are so addicted to this type of intoxication. Otherwise, they possess many qualities which even the civilized societies do not have. It is expected that in course of time these people will change their modes of life and bad habits, and prove themselves to be the true sons of India where they will live in prosperity and comfort.

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A GROUP OF KHASA GIRLS

—By Courtesy
K. M. VAID

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THE KHASA PEOPLE

THE Khasa land is a mountainous region situated in the north east of Utter Pradesh, comprising the neighbouring hills of Mussorrie and Doon valley. The territorry is wonderful from the point of view of natural beauty and picturesque environment. Those who have visited the place once cannot forget the picturesque scenery of the high Himalayas that stand as an inspiring object of a mighty grand panorama. The high peaks of the mountains, the flowing springs, varieties of fruit trees, the green valleys, the ever green attractive landscaps and the cold climate make one so enchanted that one becomes dispirited to leave the place.

The Khasas are a very ancient people. A reference of them is found in the Vishnu Puran. It is said that Khasa was a daughter of Daksha, wife of Kashyapa and mother of the Yakshas and Rakshasas. In the Karna Parva chapter of the Mahabharata, the Khasas have been referred to as the inhabitants of the Punjab. They were either Rajputs or Brahmins who got mixed up with the subjugated Dom elements (scheduled tribes), the basic and early population in these parts. The Dom elements were the underdogs of the higher classes and they had no other profession than to serve their masters, performing menial work.

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The hills of this area are very high and no peak is lower than 8000 feet. In winter, snowfall is a common feature. In this land of snow, Kalsi is one of the brightest places of this region. Here, one can find many of the inscriptions written on stones during the reign of King Asoka. The rivers Jumna, Amla and Tosh flowing-down from the mountains intermingle near Jaunsar, a famous place, where people from different parts of India come during the summer season.

The Khasas are predominatly an agricultural people. They depend on agriculture which is still crudely done. They keep cattle and sheep and fall back on their pastoral resources when crops fail. All agriculture is terraced farming and fields are of small sizes and like stairs they come down along the slopes of the hills. Careful preparation, plenty of water and rich manure of excreta of cattle or decomposed leaves are required in great quantity. They have a few implements and plaugh is often without the iron part. Even to day no wheel transport is possible to manipulate on steep hills. The yeild from the field is not very high. The farming is of intensive kind and the farmers do not spare labour and watchfulness. Every house accomodates cattle and they collect all the excreta for their fields. Moreover, they also follow the art of rotation of crops. They have common pasture grounds usually at a distance from the village. Those are the properties of all the villagers. They also maintain common cattle-sheds foe their cattle.

In their society is composed of two classes of people —one consists of those who possess plenty, and there are

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others who toil day and night to earn a living. There is no caste system there but classes exist of 'haves', the Zamindars, and the 'have-nots'. All the land belongs to the former. Rice is the most important crop. These people use both the methods of growing paddy, *archana* and *ropena*, the transplantation method. Wheat, barley, patato, onion and tomatoes are also grown there. They uaually prefer to grow cash crops. They have also subsidiary occupations, such as, spinning of wool for domestic consumption which is done by all the members of the family. Weaving is done by low caste people. The menfolk usually remain engaged in hunting and fishing and all the domestic work falls to the lot of the women. Men enjoy more leisure than women.

All of them love to eat meat, whether they are Brahmins, Rajputs or Doms. Women are addicted to smoking more than men. It is not considered a vice in their society.

They are a polyandrous people, though the custom is fast becoming obsolete in many parts of the region. As there has been no caste barrier, the Brahmins and Rajputs could marry one another. A woman can be the wife of many persons at a time. Among the brothers if one gets married, others need not do so. The wife of the brother becomes the wife of all the brothers. They do not consider this type of relationship bad or injurious to family and society. On the contrary, they consider it advantageous. They think that if there are five brothers and they marry separately, the family will be ruined. The cultivable lands are scanty and there is no other means of livelihood. If each brother has a separate family, the land will be

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divided resulting in economic difficulties. The quarrel among the wives will spoil the peace of the home and brotherly feelings and affection will evaporate into the air. This enmity will lead to the division of the property. The share falling to the lot of each brother will be insufficient to fall back upon to earn their livelihood. Moreover, to cultivate the mountainous region requires much labour and co-operation of all the tillers and a joint family can do it better. After the marriage of brothers, it has been seen that the new brides could not adjust themselves in the new environment and as a result had to live separately, thus weakening the unity and strength of the family. Besides, they believe that a woman living with one man produces more children than one who lives with many men. Thus, keeping in view the problem of the growth of population in a land of fixed resources, their ancestors made polyandary the custom of marriage in their society and it has been considered as an auspicious one since then.

Literacy and education are completely absent from this land. These people even do not know how to count articles. Certainly, at the present time there has been a change and at places educational institutions have been started and it is hoped that in course of time their history will be re-written.

In respect of garments, they are very simple. In the summer season, the menfolk wear a simple piece of small cloth, thus keeping their bodies almost naked. The winter is severe in that part, so in those days they wear pyjamas and shirts and cover their heads with caps. Women wear bodices and petticoats, wrappers and jackets and a scarf to cover their hair. They are also very fond

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of wearing ornaments of various kinds. The spectacular big ring on their nose tips, the big sized ear rings and heavy bangles are the special varieties of their jewellery.

They believe in many gods and goddesses, but they consider Lord Siva as the greatest of all gods. They worship him with much devotion and reverence. At times, they also sacrifice goats and sheep at the alter of the gods and goddesses. The custom of animal sacrifice is very peculiar. At first, they sprinkle water on the body of the selected animal which is to be butchered to propitiate the deity. If the animal shivers, they consider that the God is pleased and it is killed.

In case it does not shiver, they consider that God is displeased and they let loose the animal. They believe that beasts and animals and other animate matters, all live or die acoording to the wishes of the Almighty, the supreme creator.

Historians say that at the time of the Mahabharat, the territory of the Khasa people extended from east to west along the Himalayas. At that time, they were considered to be very advanced in civilization. It is not known how they lost their kingdom and forgot their past developed culture.

They observe the festival of Spring with much pomp and grandeur. At a fixed place men and women, young and old come to assemble and make sacrificial offers in the temples of gods and goddesses. On that occasion both men and women dance and sing with wild enthusiasm. They observe the day on the first day of the rains.

To serve a guest, they consider as their sacred duty. They spare no pains to perform it. When a guest enters

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a house, it becomes the duty of the daughters and women to wash his hands and feet. Then, preparing food for him, the woman first taste it before it is offered to the guest, for the reason that no harm could be done to the guest. All glory goes to these Khasa people who do so much for entertaining a guest. Inspite of the fact that to-day they are not at par with the so called civilized nations, still they possess many virtues which they exhibit in their social life and are worthy to be proud of by any country.

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THE PEOPLE OF THE KULU VALLEY.

THE Kulu Valley has been called a heaven on earth. Its natural scenery is so enchanting that since time immemorial people have come to visit this place for meditation in tranquility. Here, life has a particular charm. Living in the lap of nature people enjoy here much of nature's beauties and tranquility. Nature is supreme here and has given to mankind profusely what a soul thirsts for in solitude. Nature also has played a great part in influencing the lives of these people. Like nature, they are honest to the bone which is not the case in the modern civilized world. Their simplicity is proverbial and they can be won over by simple sweet words. Like their simplicity, their manners and dresses are also unassuming. They are not at all concerned what is happening in the world or going to happen in the future. They live in their own world, keeping them isolated from the civilized world and feeling contented with nature's plentiful gifts. Even to-day, they do not exhibit any inclination to learn anything about the outside world.

In fact, it is a sub division, situated in the border of Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh. Its whole area is near about 6000 square miles. Its ancient history is referred to in the story of Mahabharat, where it is written that Bhimsen of the epic fame came there once. But its true history begins two hundred years ago, which historians say has been lost in the darkness of the past. They say that the history of fiteen hundred years have been found

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in tact. The celebrated Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang refers at great length in his Indian diary about the condition of Kulu Valley during those days of his travels. From it one can know that at that time Kangra, Mandi, Shuket and some parts of present day Kashmir were in the Kulu state. After that many upheavals occurred but its name has not been effaced from the pages of history.

For a long time, the Rajputs ruled over the area. Then came the Tibetans, Gurkhas and the Sikhs who also ruled for short periods in turn. But in 1846, the Britishers brought it under their direct control and proclaimed it a sub-division. Till recently it remained a separate area because of the dirth of communication. Very recently a motor road has been built connecting the land with India, thus making it accessible to the visitors who can afford to have a look at this heavenly abode.

Monali, Rahala, Khongsar, Gandula and Kulu etc., are wonderful places of this area, where the inhabitants are mostly Buddhists and Hindus. The Buddhists live mainly in the northern sector, while the Hindus live in the southern sector. In the last general census it has come to the notice of the Govt. that many Buddhists posed themselves as Hindus. In the Laddhak area, many Buddhists have accepted Muslim religion in the past few years but that is not the case with Kulu.

Like the villagers of India, these people are also very simple folks, illiterate and ignorant about the outside world. In each village, there is a god of its own and the villagers worship them with much veneration. On auspicious days they perform the ceremonies of worship in the temples which every village possessess. There fairs

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are organised on the occasions of Dasherah and Spring festivals, where all the inhabitants of Kulu and of the neighbouring areas assemble. In these fairs, the local artisans get opportunity of selling their own products of handicrafts. They make wonderful woollen shawls which are favoured at every places of India.

The dress of the people of this territory is an object of curiosity for others. The people of the northern tract wear different dresses. Here, menfolk usually wear a shirt, a narrow legged pyjama, woollen jacket and a head gear in the nature of a cap. Formerly the people used to wear warm clothes all through the year, but now-a-days, the enlightened class are using cotton clothes during the summer season. The people of the southern sector also do the same thing. The northern part is more cold than the south, because snow falls there nine months in a year. The dress of the ladies are of two kinds. One is like that of the Punjabis, salwar and kamiz and the other is completely different, which is principally made of woollen clothes. To manage their hair, they tie a handkerchief around their head, a part of which hangs at the back side.

Nature has made womenfolk of this area exquisitely beautiful with good facial cut and fair complexion. They also know the art of enhancing their beauty with the help of flowers and colours. Many of them braid their hair in two plaits. They use ring on ears, bangles on wrists, stamps on fingers and pendants on noses. They smoke cigarettes, bidis and tobacco in great quantity. Women are not kept in segregation and they work side by side with menfolk. The do not exhibit any shyness.

There is another sect of people found here, who move

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from place to place without settling down at a particular site. They are known by the name of Heshi. They have no house of their own to dwell in and naturally they have to live in tents. Their profession is to beg by performing certain types of dances before the public. From olden times, they have preserved this tradition which they in turn leave with their children. They go on with their profession throughout the whole day and after the sun is set, they gather together and spend the night playing cards, making jokes and gossiping among themselves.

Manali is considered to be the most attractive town of the area. Besides, it is also a religious place where attractive festivities are held in the two famous temples. One of the temples is of God *Manu* and the other is of Goddess *Hidimba*. It is said that *Manu*, the great saint, underwent his meditations here and as a result it was previously called *Manulok* but was changed to Manali subsequently. They say that *Manu* was the son of the Sun. The Goddess *Hidimba* was a lady demon, who married Bhimsen one of the sons of Kunti. The inhabitants of Manali worship her as a goddess. On the occasion of Dasherah, the temples of Manali become objects of sight. Songs, dances and other merriments make the occasion an exquisite one. Traders from different lands assemble there on these occasions with varieties of commodities to sell and purchase.

There is a practice of sacrificing animals to the Goddess *Hidimba*. In every village these offerings are held and *Hidimba* is recognised as the greatest goddess of all. The temple of *Hidimba* is thousands of years old. In the temple, there is a big stone, which these tribal

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people respect with awe and reverence. The priest of the temple is an expert in Tantric science. It is believed that at times, the spirits overpower the priest and at that time anything coming out of the priest's mouth becomes absolutely a prophetic utterance. On the Dasherah occasion every body assembles before the Temple yard and they begin to dance in pairs along with the beatings of drums and cymbals and continue to do so till they are on the verge of loosing senses. At times, some of them fall on the ground and they are taken to be inspired by gods and in communion with the heavenly spirits. They propitiate God by sacrificing many kinds of animals, including buffaloes, which present horrible scenes.

Rahala is also a very important place in the Kulu Valley. At one of the high places of this area, there is a big stone which is believed to be very famous. The inhabitants of the area also believe that under that stone there lives a giant snake throwing out many colours from its body. This is called the snake-cave. The people have so much faith in it that they worship the snake as god. Many persons consider it to be one of those seers of that ancient age, who are believed to undergo many peneances in this world in different shapes and forms. One thing surprising about this snake is that the pilgrims offer it different eatables but it does not do any harm to anybody. Many scientists are of the opinion that the site is so high that a snake usually loses its poisonous stings. There is a story current that previously there lived many snakes here, but once a European visitor killed many of them by gunshot and after that almost all of them disappeared except this gaint one. The people living

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here consider it a great privilege to get a sight of the snake.

The inhabitants of this place are quite experts in the art of walking over the snow tracks, glancing at which a person from the plain will get alarmed instantaneously. Even children are not afraid to walk on those dangerous paths. It appears that these people are fearless. They really do not know what fear is. They live mainly on agriculture but they have to do other work also for the reason that merely by cultivation they cannot meet their both ends. They tend sheep and goats and collect wool from them. They are also known for weaving woollen articles. The duties of womenfolk are not simply confined to their household domain; they also work in the fields. It is a wonderful sight to see them planting in groups the seedlings of paddy, singing sweet folk songs. In fact, their voices are so sweet that the listener is always enchanted and their beautiful songs make even the dumb nature speak out in merriment. Although in wants and privation, they are always happy and gay. In early times, the practice of polyandry was prevalent in their society, which is now becoming rare day by day. The system of divorce exists here but society does not look at it very nicely at present.

In the northern sector, one can find some families of Rajputs but their number is so small that it becomes a difficult affair to procure a groom for a bride among them. The result is that a girl is married either to an old person or to an under-age boy. They strictly adhere to the ancient superstitions of marrying the girls within their own caste and clan and to deviate from it, is considered a sin

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by them. Many of them are Buddhists by religion but in practice they follow all the traditions of the Hindus.

The Southern part of Kulu Valley is very famous for games, where varieties of games are found and hunts-men are quite busy during the season.

There is another sect of people, called Gaddi, who principally are found to tend sheep and goats. But one interesting sight is that they are always found to be spinning wool by hand spindles, wherever they may be. They also keep dogs for the protection of their cattle and sheep. Those dogs are so faithful that no outsider or any other beasts can snatch away any lamb or goat from the flock. It has been said that when these people taking the lambs in their laps go on spinning their spindles sitting at a place, it seems that fairies of heaven have come down to the earth. God has given these women sweet voices and great beauty, which are envied by all.

Kulu is renowned for apples of various kinds. The whole area is covered by snow during the winter. Even then, the beauties of nature are not diminished, they are enhanced by the snow all around. There are found many hot springs oozing out from different places, whose waters are very conducive to health, At many places, relics of ancient history are seen even to-day. In fact, it has been a garden of Gods and still it is preserved like that.

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THE PEOPLE OF KINNAUR AREA

THE territory along the road that leads from Simla to Ladakh comprises the Kinnaur state. The name of this state is often found in the ancient religious books of India. This territory is an ideal place and we do not know much about it, although our ancestors had plenty of knowledge about these people. In religious books, the Kinnaur state has been compared with the land of Gods. The meaning of the word *Kinnaur* is 'godly'. If it is seen through, one can find the truth of the statement because in ancient days, this land was so prosperous and developed that it was called the land of the Gods. If not the Heavenly Gods, at least the worldly Gods did live there.

Looking at the handsome features of these people, one can easily come to this conclusion that they are the descendants of the ancient Aryans. They also consider themselves to be so. Their food, modes of life and other social customs resemble those of the Aryans of the bye-gone days. Hospitality is considered as a great religious act by these people. By entertaining guests and travellers, they derive much mental satisfaction and pleasure, like the ancient Indians.

There are many stories about the belief that this land is considered as a land of Gods. They say that there are many remnants of the old days which prove that it was a private heaven of the gods. Even to-day, the people of this area follow the age-old traditions. Their belief in

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their own religion is so great that perhaps no other people of India have so much strength and conviction. These people are not prepared at all to listen to any scientific explanation of religion of the modern times. They have a blind faith in the worship of spirits even, and that has a special place in their social life. They believe that spirits can keep at bay all the evils of life. In every social and private function, such as, worship, cure of disease, sorrows and happiness, they propitiate the spirits. It is also said that their troubles are over as soon as they perform those worships of spirits. They also practise the art of meditation. Although their forms of meditation are not fully ancient, yet they are the only people who have kept some traditions of the ancient times alive with them. Another very interesting practice they follow is that of penances. Sitting at a fixed place for days together, either in the caves or at dugout places inside the walls, they observe the penances. They have great faith in *Mantras* and they believe that if they could be chanted rightly, one could perform miracles.

They observe another custom among them, which is called '*Foa*', by which they undergo a process of great sufferings followed by meditation. They believe that man can have salvation, if at the time of death his life goes out through the head. Otherwise, if it is not clearly known how he died, in that case, it is believed that the man will not get a good life next time. So, they perform '*Foa*' penance with strict rigidity. Before they perform this, their preceptors give them the *Mantras*, which they go on uttering silently in a most sanctified manner. By the good effect of the *Mantras*, which turns into a habit owing to its repetition again and again, a place on the scull of the head is inflamed. Even then the *Mantras* are

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repeated with great devotion. Then after sometime blood rushes to the head and it oozes out puncturing the inflamed spot of the head. That is the realisation, which they pursue with great vehemence and veneration. They believe that the souls of those devotees who die in this way, go to Heaven.

In the aforesaid effort of these people, there are found no deceptions, duplicity or tricks even in the present day world and learned persons are simply astonished to observe their endless efforts for salvation. It shows that there might have been some truth hidden in this strenuous observance of penances. It cannot be washed off simply saying that it is nothing but the result of a blind faith. It may be that we have lost its practical utility in our lives and we are prone to call it a hypocrisy, which may not be the truth. This custom of the Kinnaur people reminds us of the ancient civilization of India, when every child of India was a hermit. In those days, at every place, there were monasteries of seers and saints, who inspired every heart to follow that path of detachment and meditation and every one was devoted to religion.

About dresses it has been noticed that the pious souls among them wear very simple dresses. Although considerable influences of Tibetan style are visible in their dresses, yet they also exhibit many sign of Indian fashions. Like other Indian women, the ladies wear salwar and kurta and cover their heads with a piece of handkerchief. Winter is very severe in that region and as a result, they wear warm clothes according to their capacities. The women folk are extremely beautiful and the innocence in their features cannot be described. But like the women of other areas, they also like to wear bangles, nose studs and ear rings.

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Almost all their jewelleries are of silver but the rich use golden ornaments. They look quite pretty even in simple dresses and that is their special attraction.

In Kinnaur society, the old lady of the house is very much respected. She is revered by all. All the social customs are followed according to her instructions. The menfolk also wear simple dresses. They usually wear caps on heads. Trousers of narrow legs and tight jackets are their national custume. The menfolk mostly perform all the laborious work in which women also lend their hands. At their leisure time, they spin thread using hand spindles. They are not at all habituated to waste time in idleness and gossips. The Kinnaur women are not flirts. They never drink wine which is the practice with almost all the mountainous women of India. Any type of intoxication is absent from the life of the womenfolk. Their marriage rites are also very simple. On holidays, in fairs and festivities, men and women enjoy and make merriment to their hearts content.

Nature is not very helpful to them and the land gets less rain resulting in periodic famines. In those days of famine they have to labour very hard to fill their stomachs. The majority of the population is poor and perhaps only the members of the ruling family are well-to-do in the whole land. But there is one virtue in them, that inspite of their low income, they are very contented people. They have less craving for more and that is a very surprising thing in the modern age.

Here, the inhabitants are generally cultivators and shepherds. They earn their livelihood by tilling lands

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and grazing animals. There are no big cities in the land but there are many small villages which are peculiarly organised. In the middle of every village, there is a recreation spot, where they perform their worship and ceremonial rituals. Various images and portraits of Buddha and inscribed sermons in Pali language are kept at this place. The preceptors and religious instructors of the people live in these recreation places. All the houses of the village are constructed around this spot. The houses are not all built on high land. In every important village there are two entrances. To enter into a village one has to pass through these gates, as there exists no other entrance to the village. There is no arrangements for water and they absolutely depend on God and nature for it. The springs are plenty in number, which bring water from the melting snows. Sarahan is the biggest city of this area and the village Chini has the last post Office in this border.

Essential articles. at times, are not available in the villages. The travellers and and the pilgrims pass through this land in good number during the season but they have to carry all their required articles on their backs. The people of this area, though poor, are not at all disinclined to entertain guests, if there be any. Most of the in habitants of the area are followers of Buddhism. That has been the result of their being nearer to Tibet. They also show much respects to Dalai Lama. Inspite of all these, they never desire to be the citizens of Tibet or of the land of Dalai Lama. They are proud sons of India.

The land of Gods, though poor and life there full of hardships, yet it is a place, which excels any other, in-natural beauties. No doubt the inhabitants are illiterate

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but they have kept alive many ancient traditions, which they may be rightly proud of. They are far behind on the path of modern civilization, yet they are admired for the preservation of their glorious past.

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THE BAIGA PEOPLE

THE Baiga people live in the eastern part of Madhya Pradesh, where the Gonds are also a predominant tribe. These two tribes are said to be the most ancient people of India, who lived in this land even prior to the coming of the Aryans. Thousands of years have passed, many changes have taken place in this universe, but nothing could touch them and they are still in the same place where they had been at the beginning of their journey. There are many scholars who opine that these people are not the earliest settlers in India. Before them there were people, who lived in the Stone Age. Those people are not to be seen now-a-days. Perhaps, they have become civilized, coming in contact with the Aryans and so, no traces of Stone Age are found now. Nothing could be said very definitely and all explanations are more or less guess works. After the Stone Age, there came the Copper Age, some imprint of which are still found among the tribal people of Assam and Southern India. In fact, the whole history of ancient India is in a confused state of affairs, because of the fact that many ancient relics still remain in the womb of mystery and require much research work in this line. After the discovery of Harappa and Mahenjadaro, the old conception about the ancient civilization of India has been changed and new lights have been thrown on the Indus Valley civilization. It has been amply proved that a great civilization existed long before the Aryan civilization in India and might be, these

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BAIGAS IN A FESTIVE MOOD

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people were the Aryans, who went out of India and again came back.

Still it cannot be definitely said that Gonds and Baigas were the original inhabitants of India. Their manners, customs and ways of life are all different from the Aryans, still they are all followers of Hinduism. Might be, that coming in contact with the Aryans, they accepted the Aryan religion.

The Baigas and Gonds are two different sects who are socially wide apart from each other. The Gonds are expert huntsmen, while the Baigas are renowned wizards, practising the art of sorcery from time immemorial.

The villages of the Gonds are not self sufficient. The needs of the villagers are not met by the work of the artisans, who are scanty in number. The artisans are quite skillful in iron smelting and making iron implements. They are poor but their wants are also negligible. The women-folk are very simple and hard working. They are not very conscious of their body decorations, as is the case with the other tribal women. But tattooing is very common with them. Their arrangements of hair are very peculiar and they decorate it with a number of combs on their heads.

As such, they are still accustomed to their nomadic life and use crude methods of cultivation. They perform a ceremony of dedication for the propitiation of God to get better harvests. Blood of sacrificed animals mixed with the packets of seed, is sown in the fields with the belief of getting good harvest. These functions are accompanied with songs and dances by the entire community. In this area, they also have terrace farming in the

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hilly slopes of the lands. They have also the knowledge of keeping the fields fallow for two-three years, for regaining rich fertility of soil. It is also very interesting to note that where the crops are better, animals are not sacrificed and the rites and practices of religious functions, are replaced by thanksgiving to God after the new crop.

There are many landless people and they live always at the mercy of the higher classes. The poor people mostly need cash to meet ceremonial expenses of marriages etc., thus binding them to their masters to repay it, in the form of service. Previously, these people were more compact, but individual requirements have increased, seeing the examples of the higher social groups in the neighbourhood. But the sense of honesty and obligation is very high among them and they remain life long servants in the master's family.

In their social organisation, they have a leader, who is called *Sirdar*. There is a system of giving training to young boys and girls in each village, in social and economic problems of life. They have got dormitories which are usually situated in the heart of the jungle. Each evening boys and girls assemble there to have dances, songs and games. Each girl is paired off with a boy and they spend time together upto midnight. After that, they are dispersed. It has been seen that marriages usually follow these dormitory life of the young community.

The Baiga people also possess skill in archery but their fame lies mostly in the art of witchcraft which they are practising even to-day. The inhabitants living in the adjacent areas praise them for their magical skill and they

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also respect them for this art. There are many stories about this art current in the neighbourhood. It is said that persons suffering from diseases, and declared hopeless cases by big doctors have been cured by their skill of witchcraft. One can have remedy of any type of trouble from these men. It is also said that they can even bring sunshine in the midst of the clouds by their *mantras* of magical spell. They burn the dense forests and make it turn to ashes. The wild animals are greatly afraid of them. Even their children play with wild animals.

It is said that formerly they used to till land with spades and axes. It was the British Govt. who after completely occupying the whole of India stopped this practice by promulgating laws. The offenders were severely punished for such offences. This act of the Govt. shocked these people greatly. The whole affair cropped up as a result of their practice of cultivation which was spoiling the forest wealth of India. Their superstition and old beliefs were that to furrow land with plough was a great sin because they considered themselves as the sons and daughters of mother earth. So they could not pierce the body of mother earth by the blades of the ploughs. For this reason, they were using small axes and spades to excavate the land. Their whole process was a peculiar one. First of all, they were to burn the forests with fire. Then, when the ashes settled on the surface of the land, they planted their grains in those ashes. Mostly for two or three years, they could get some return from this method. Then, they would go to a fresh forest and burnt it. In this way, they were practically destroying the forest wealth of the country. The Britishers took a great exception to this destruction and stopped this by laws. The religious

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sentiment of these people was wounded because their beliefs were of ancient times. They were poor people, labouring hard to earn two square meals but their mental strength got weakned after they were prohibited to burn the forests for their cultivation.

Most of them are dark in complexion. Like all other aboriginal people, they also love to keep their bodies almost without garments. They use simply a small piece of cloth around their waist. Women also do the same, with the difference that they put a part of the cloth on their breast.

They worship different gods and goddesses. They have so much faith in god that a disbeliever cannot open his mouth in their midst. Moreover, they are in the habit of worshipping almost all the objects of nature, such as, river, tank, hill and spirits of all kinds. In every village a temple exists and they worship there with great reverence. They believe that the village god is the protector of the village from any evil incursion. If at any time some epidemic breaks in, they take it to be the result of the displeasure of their god. So, they arrange special worship on that occasion to dispel the wrath of god. The Ram Navami festival is celebrated by these people with great pomp and grandeur. On this day, a great procession is organised. Every man and woman participates with enthusiasm. The womenfolk carry in their hands small saplings of wheat and paddy and go on singing devotional songs, followed by the devotees, who at times become unconscious in the process of their meditation. These devotees are very much respected in their community. It is said that these devotees can rub red hot irons of the fetters of the temple with their hands without burning

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them. It is only the sinless person who can do so. The belief is that they do it by their magical power for which they are very famous.

The strange thing is that they themselves perform all their religious rites and worships without any assisstance from Brahmins, but still they have great respects for the Brahmin class. They consider them to be the most noble people of all.

They are lovers of songs and dances. Their community dance is very interesting. The menfolk and womenfolk stand in separate lines, in front of each other and catching hands of each other, they go on dancing accompanied by songs. Women put jingles on their ankles while dancing. In their simple life, the songs and dance play a great role and the innocent pleasure they derive out of it is a thing to be envied by other civilized people.

They live mainly on wage labour at present. *Bidi* leaves are found in plenty in their area. The trading community of the place employ these people as labourers to collect these leaves. For agriculture, they have very scanty land and whoever work in the land are mostly hired labourers of landlords. They live in thatched houses, built of bamboo sticks, which they have to repair every alternate years. In fact, their life is very hard and and they live in constant poverty but there is one virtue that the discontentment of the modern age has not touched them yet.

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THE KABAILI PEOPLE

THE territory of the Kabaili people lies to the north west of India just on the border of Kashmir state. It is surrounded by hills all around and no green vegetation is visible there. The reason is that there is scarcity of rainfall there. There comes a time in the year when not a single inch of water falls on the land. The most surprising thing is that one can see water nowhere. So the hills are absolutely dry without any green vegetation. Such a sight of emptiness is rarely seen anywhere. The climate is extreme during both night and day. The sun is very hot in the day time and equally nights become exceptionally cool.

Inspite of nature's extravagances, people have made this place also a habitable one. The people who live here are called Kabaili. Their life is full of sorrows because they live a very hard and struggling life. They have no sufficient food for them, yet one is surprised to see their healthy appearances and their fair complexion.

From the very beginning these people lived an isolated life. Perhaps nobody has ever dared to raise his arms against the land. When such occasion arose, that the land was threatened by a powerful army, these people always agreed to pay revenue to them. Thus, they were always spared from the excesses of invading armies. Even today, the Pakistan Govt. is trying hard to subdue them but these people are undaunted and go on living as isolated as ever.

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These people are composed of many different sects. All of them are the followers of Islamic religion. They speak *Posth* language mainly. In some areas, Hindus are also visible but their customs and habits have also been changed to such an extent by their environment that at times, it is not very easy to distinguish them from the Muslims.

Their principal means of livelihood are tending of animals, hunting in the forests and a little bit of agricultural work. They also earn something by looting the travellers who pass by their way. This practice has come to them from old days and they are still in the habit of following that practice. Somehow, they procure their bread and are not willing to concentrate their energy on some permanent source of earning. So, as such, they lead a very reckless life and are not at all careful about their future progress. In a word, it can be said that they are in a most barbaric state of affairs.

In this land, women work more than men. Besides their household work, they have to gather food for the cattle and attend to the work in the field. The menfolk taking the cattle, go out into the forests early in the morning and spend the whole day hunting and tending animals. All the time, they keep firearms and other weapons with them. The reason for this is that they dwell in a place where life always faces risks. Anything may happen any time. So, they remain always ready with guns to meet any situation that may crop up anytime. It has been said that a gun is as essential for them as a stick is for a blind man. Even small boys are expert shots, because from their childhood, they go on hunting birds and beasts along with their elders.

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The Kabaili people are used to live in groups. Each group has a chieftain, who practically leads the whole group. They have their *panchayat* system also, by which they deal and settle their, mutual problem. Their quarrels take such a rude shape that it can not be imagined by a civilized society. If they develop an enmity with anybody, they become so crazy to take revenge that they lose all senses. They do not find any peace of mind till they teach the enemy a lesson. This is not the case with the menfolk only, the same is the case with the woman also. Of course, there are many who surrender to their powerful opponents and become again friendly with them. But they do not forget the past and when opportunity comes they take the revenge. Revenge they must take, whether early or late. They are so cruel by nature that even a brother does not rely upon his own brother. As a result, death has become a constant companion for them.

Inspite of all these cruelties in their nature, they have a great virtue of being very hospitable to a guest. To perform that duty, they even undergo many hazards. If they fail to entertain a guest properly, they become so mortified that they cannot forget it in life.

The Kabaili women are very famous for their beauty and fidelity. Even married women with children possess the beauty of maidens. They work in fields and forest very hard, still it is surprising that they can preserve their beauty intact. There is another thing to be noticed that a male and a female among them, cannot be distinguished very easily, because both wear same garments and head-covers.

All their social customs are of Islamic style. The practice of polygamy and polyandry are very common.

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They do not observe any *purdha* system and women are as free as men.

Being tribal people, they also do not take bath. If they wash their mouth once in a year, that is sufficient for them. Layers of dirt are accumulated on their bodies. The clothes they wear once, they do not change till they are completely torn. So, they usually prefer coloured clothes to white ones. They take very simple food and in a simple manner. They prefer to take maize bread to wheat bread and meat is their delicious food.

Their houses are like caves with small doors. They keep cattle inside their rooms, as a precaution against being stolen away. That makes the atmosphere of their living rooms very foul and dirty. But they are not at all mindful of that. Since their childhood, they are acclimatised to this type of dirty atmosphere, so they pass their days quite happily.

These Kabaili people are great followers of their religious heads, who are called *Mullahs*. The *Mullahs* are so powerful that by their order, these people will not hesitate even to face death. Raising the cry of Islam, these *Mullahs* make them do anything they want. It is said, that people in no other place have such blind faith and offer so much devotion to the *Mullahs* as these people.

They are much addicted to tobacco. Wherever you find them, they are smoking their *Hukkas*. They go on smoking throughout the whole day and night. Even sitting in a social gathering, they indulge in this tobacco smoking without any scruple or shame, because this is their community etiquette.

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The greatest hindrance against their development is illiteracy. If in future they are given the opportunity of education they are sure to improve their habits and social customs and live like civilized people. The primary need for them is education. It is a matter of great regret that their Govt. is still blind about the problem and is not yet in a mood to give proper thought in this direction.

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THE THARU PEOPLE

NO body exactly knows how many nationalities live in this world. Travel a little in this world and at every interval, you will find novel people, with novel societies and strange habits, which will make you amazed. If two sons of the same parents live separately, at two different places, they are sure to exhibit great differences between them. Who knows how many different societies, people have established on this earth and they must have built them according to their necessity.

There are many places in this world, where as such, people won't like to live but if forced, they have to live. Life has been very uninteresting, rather a failure there. A large number was destined to acclimatise the climate and the environment, whereas many proved to be a failure. We will discuss now about such a people and a place which is called the Tharu area. There are many well informed persons who say that in the beginning, there lived no human being in this area, but to-day, we find it inhabited by a people who are of the Tharu nationality. Looking at these people, it usually comes in mind that hunger and hardship and the vagabond nature of mankind have made them to roam from place to place and settle down in different parts of the world.

When the Tharu people came to settle down in their present territory, it was full of dense forests. The screams of the wild animals created panic in every heart. The

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place was totally solitary, desolate and full of hazards. The Tharu people, by dint of hard labour, made the land a habitable one; and to fill their hungry stomach, they made it suitable for agricultural purpose even. In the beginning, they had to suffer a lot, but with the passage of time, they made it more tolerable to settle down there, as the place was found to be very secure, from the point of protection. Now the question arises, who were the forefathers of these people ? Why did they leave their original homeland selected this odd place for habitation ? In the face of many other places in the world, what fascination did they have for this place for building their homes ?

It is said that environments play a greater role than human desire to determine man's destiny. This is best visible in the case of the Tharu people. To understand them better, we must, first of all, know the geographical position of their territory, before we know something about their ways of life and social institutions. The geography of the place went a long way to influence the development of their social life, because at the time, when they came to this territory, they found it to be the most secure place of all.

In fact, the Tharu territory is situated in the interior of the Himalayas, a place between west of Nepal State and east of Nainital area. It is a very very a dangerous place covered by dense forests, where there are no means of communication. In the forests, live the ferocious animals, who endanger life at every moment. Of all things, the climate of the area is the worst, which is not at all conducive to human health and habitation. The land is infested with mosquitoes and the fury of malaria fever rages the place, almost all through the year. The Tharu

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people are not at all afraid of malaria, because they have been dwelling there for so many generations that now they are acclimatised to it.

The land appears to be very attractive and magnificent from the scenic view point. Nature has bestowed its bounty in plenty here. Beautiful springs flow down with clattering sounds. Lovely hills and rivulets are seen meandering here and there. The small villages situated on either banks look no short of wonderlands. The patches of grey colour in the midst of vast greenness create a landscape matchless in beauty. But inspite of all these allurments of nature, the place is not suitable for a visitor because of its malaria.

The people of this land love hunting of all things. As their houses are inside the dense forests, they are always scared by ferocious wild animals. For this. they always remain alert and prepared against their attack. So, they have turned to be very expert in marksmanship, which is so accurate that it never fails. Almost all of them possess firearms without any licences. Now, the Govt. has made it compulsory for them to have a licence for possessing arms. Previously, the procedure of getting a licence was very cumbrous, but now the Govt. has simplified it for them. Most of the people of the area are uneducated; so, they do not even now possess any licence for their arms.

The real history of these people, who live on this peak of hills, is such, that India is proud of them. They have all through lived with their heads up and have never surrendered to any forces, whether human or of nature. It is really interesting, as well as, awe inspiring to learn about

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the unbounded valour, they exhibited in their struggle for existence. To-day, many of us call them backward and keep them at arm's length, considering them as savages and for that reason even hate them; but if we look back to their past and to the early history of their ancestors, we can realize our mistakes. We should not forget that the people whom we consider as uncivilized are none other than our own people.

The ancient place of residence of these Tharu people was Rajasthan, the land of the Rajputs, who showed to the world, a great example of heroism, valour and self-sacrifice, for their motherland. They had a tradition of teaching their children to die like martyrs in the battle-fields, fighting against the enemy for the protection of their honour, respect and religion. These Tharu people are the descendants of these Rajputs, but have now become strangers to us and we call them savages. What a strange course of history !

A few centuries ago, when the Muslim invaders attacked the heroic citadel of Chittore, the Rajputs in spite of much valourous fight and heroic sacrifices, could not withstand the assault and were ultimately defeated. The reason for this defeat was that some of their own people betrayed them and as a result, every Rajput died killing themselves one by one. The queens of Chittore thought it better to die on the burning pyre and save their honour than to fall into the hands of the enemy and blemish the fair name of their ancestors. The State priests were a greedy class of people, who conspired with the enemies to to betray the queens. As a result, the queens could not reach the burning pyre. But somehow, the conspiracy of the priests was known to every one, that they were busy to

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hand over the queens to the enemies. The queens understood the nefarious motives of the priest class in time and they all became cautious. Now it was not an easy job for the enemy to capture them. So, one night the queens escaped from the palace secretly. Walking over the plains, jungles and mountains and crossing many hazards, they reached their present abode. The enemy searched for them in every nook and corner of Rajputana but no traces of them could be found. The queens, in the meantime, took shelter here, in this protected place and perhaps, they were the first persons who reached this land.

This plan of bringing out the queens from the palace to this country, was made by the chivalrous Rajput soldiers who were their guards, when the whole country was at war, against the invading enemy. All the kings and the army commanders of the land were at the front. The guards, left behind to look after the queens in the palaces, were very faithful and honest. So, when the time came, these soldiers saved the queens from the treachery of the priests and once more proved the faithfulness of their profession even at the cost of their lives.

The queens were very much pleased at the bravery and faithfulness of these soldiers and were anxious to repay their debt. At that time, they were all penniless. Still, they decided to give these soldiers something, as a reward for their service to them. Ultimately, when they settled down in the Tharu territory permanently, they offered their young unmarried daughters to these soldiers to keep the dignity of the Rajput traditions. Receiving this offer from the queens, the soldiers were highly pleased and became proud of themselves. They began to clear the forest of the new abode by stupendous physical labour and

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turned this jungle area into a heaven for their newly got queens. In spite of their marriages with the princesses, the soldiers showed much respect to their wives and thenceforth, the tradition developed there to call a bride a queen, which is the practice even in the present time. In fact, a married woman is a queen there.

This behaviour of the menfolk towards the women has became a tradition with these people of Tharu land. Every married man is completely under the control of his wife. It is considered a duty by the menfolk to abide by the orders of their womenfolk. The wives never allow their husbands to enter the kitchen, which is their own domain, nor allow them to sit inside it, for the purpose of taking meals, because the wives still consider them as queens of the old days. The menfolk consider themselves as the obedient Rajput soldiers. Hundreds of years have passed since, but they are yet in the past delusion and no change has come over them.

It does not mean that the womenfolk neglect their husbands or do not give them their due respects. In fact, they serve their husbands with much respect and devotion. In the beginning, the husbands did not put any extra pressure on their wives to keep the memory of their queenly status alive in their hearts, but along with the passing of time, it has become a custom with them. The pressure of circumstances has brought many such traditions in their lives, which still remain with them. It is a fact, that the development of a society depends on the activities of the people and the circumstances created thereof. The forces that change it, grow within its womb. If we look at the Tharu people, we will find, that their society, when they were the inhabitants of Rajputana was different from the

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present one, which they created after migrating to this area.

The Tharu people hate the Brahmin class so much that they consider it inauspicious to see their face in the morning. The other Hindus of India consider the Brahmins as superior to them, but the Tharu people think them as the basest of all. When their ancestors were residents of Chittore, they considered the Brahmins as a superior class. But when they conspired to sell out the honour and prestige of their country to the enemy, they lost their former respect. After that, they were completely ostracised from their social life and denounced as a class of traitors to the nation.

It may be a surprising news to many that these Tharu people are the decendants of the *Surya* clan of Rajputs. According to historians, the king of Chittore came through the line of Sree Ram Chandra, the ancient legendery figure, the son of Dasharatha of Oudh. (This has been told by Colonel Told, in his History of the Rajputs). The Tharu people believed in the same Gods and followed the same customs of the ancient people, but after the heinious act of the Brahmins, they gave up the old customs and traditions. In any case, they are religious people and perform many ceremonies throughout the year, in the name of God. They consider Thursdays and Tuesdays as auspicious days, so they perform their religious functions on these days. Their marriage customs are very peculiarly simple.

They have the custom of performing the betrothal ceremony, before the actual marriage function. When both the families of the bridegroom and the bride agree about the marriage proposal, some persons come to the bride's

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house with sweets and garments, where they are received with much courtesy and respect. Then, both the parties assemble together in the house of the bride's father. The fathers of the boy and the girl sit side by side in the congregation; where wine is distributed in ample quantity and they mutually exchange their respective tumblers. All the guests are entertained to a sumptuous feast. When all the preliminaries of the marriage are over, a lyrical drama is staged on the spot, glorifying the story of Ram Chandra. In the last part of the marriage, the mother of the bride touches the feet of the boy's father and begs some money of him, for the ornaments of the girl. The boy's father gives her some money in cash, according to his capacity. This money is spent only for making ornaments for the girl. To spend it otherwise is considered to be a great sin. Then, on an auspicious day, the marriage is performed. Marriages are generally held in the month of *Magh*. On this occasion, the groom's father arranges a grand feast. Wine, meat, fish and buttered rice are consumed in plenty. A social gathering is also organised, when men and women go on dancing and singing, with great enthusiasm.

The Tharu people have a simple mode of living. Even to day, they live like aborigines forced by the circumstances. For this, we consider them savages, but in fact they are also decendants of the Aryans. Like us, they are also born in India, share the same food of the land and the same blood flows in their veins too.

The present world is changing very fast and its effects are also visible among the Tharu people. We can very well see, how skillfully they migrated from one place to another and built their own homes and hearths. Their story is extremely interesting and at the same time inspiring to all of us.

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